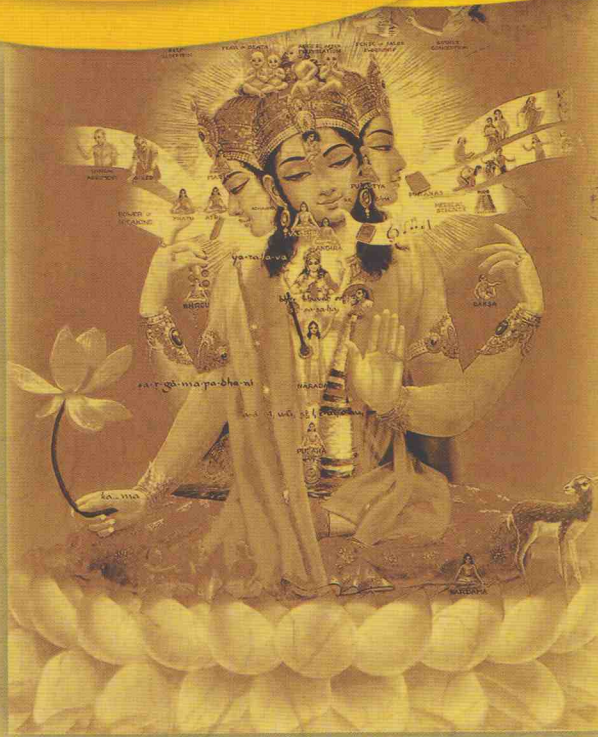


संस्कृतोच्चारणम् SAMSKRTOCCĀRAṆAM



A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO
SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION

LOKANĀTHA SVĀMĪ

His Holiness Lokanatha Maharaja is presenting simple instructions for improving our Sanskrit pronunciation. His explanations are clear, entertaining, and thorough, but not more thorough than necessary for the purpose at hand. Every devotee in ISKCON should gladly study Maharaja's instructions with care and attention.

The readers will get the benefit of learning right Sanskrit pronunciation from an expert communicator & an empowered worldwide preacher.

Gopiparanadhana Dasa
Senior Sanskrit Editor,
The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust
Director, Bhagavat Vidyapith.
Govardhana



Comments on Lokanātha Swāmī's *Samskṛtoccāraṇam*

When I went to get my Gāyatrī mantra from Śrīla Prabhupāda, he was repeating the words to me. I had a sheet in front of me, and Prabhupāda was correcting my pronunciation of every word. Once, twice, and sometimes three times he would correct me on one word. He was going on correcting me, but after two or three lines he just stopped. He gave up on correcting me. So, devotees should improve their Sanskrit pronunciation. Because we are to use Sanskrit terms and verses throughout our lives, let us learn the basics of pronunciation; otherwise, we might inadvertently say something quite different from what we mean. A graphic example from English: one politely says to a person, "Please sit here." Mispronouncing the "s" in "sit" as "sh" is only a slight mistake, but produces a wholly different and grossly vulgar meaning.

—Bhakti Vikāsa Swāmi

His Holiness Lokanātha Mahārāja has researched the original, scientific, and authentic method of learning and teaching the Sanskrit language. He has designed this book as a complete guide to Sanskrit pronunciation for any serious student, no matter which lineages and backgrounds they come from, or which accents and types of mouth and lip movements they may be accustomed to in their native tongues. The pain felt by Mahārāja when he hears Sanskrit words mispronounced is analogous to the pain felt by the Supreme Lord when He sees religious principles decline. Just as the Lord reestablishes religion, Mahārāja wishes to reestablish the exact articulations, accents, and mouth and tongue movements with which every word, letter, and syllable of Sanskrit is pronounced. Although such a great devotee as Mahārāja is engaged in worldwide missionary efforts, he has still devoted time to pursue this arduous task. I pray to the Lord to bless him with success. I recommend that all the devotees in ISKCON contribute to and take advantage of this project by reforming their own and others' Sanskrit pronunciation.

—Acarya Sanskritananda Hari
Kausalya Pitham
Vadodara, Gujarat



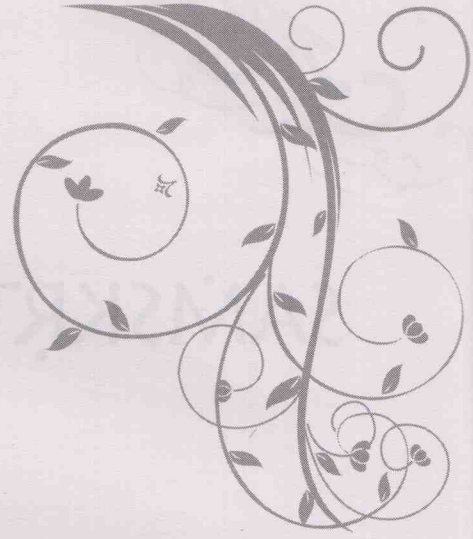
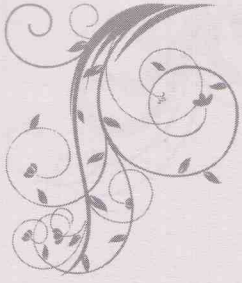
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LOKANĀTHA SVĀMĪ



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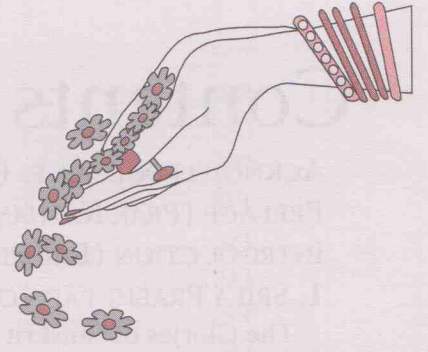
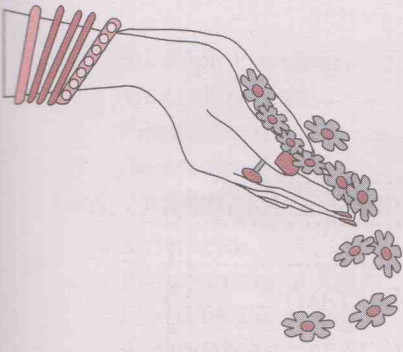
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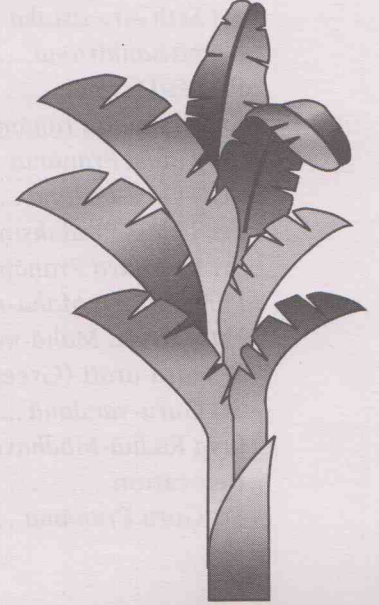
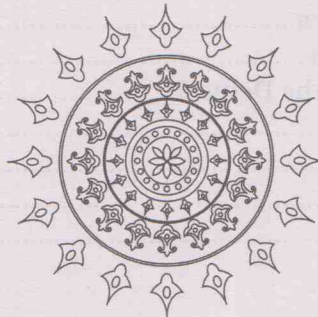
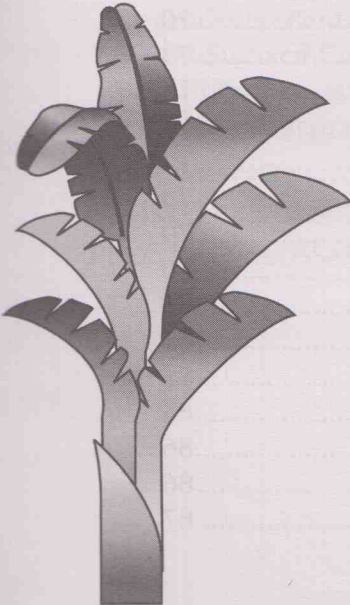
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Dedicated to
Śrīla Prabhupāda
and

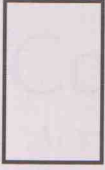
One and all who need to work
on improving their Sanskrit pronunciation
to bring it up to the level that
Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended when he wrote,
“Pronounce these verses very nicely.”



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Preface (*Prāk Kathanam*)

Lord Caitanya's *saṅkīrtana* movement is for everyone in the world, not just for a particular class of people, especially not just for Sanskrit scholars. In fact, the students of Sanskrit in Śrīdhāma Navadvīpa were the last people to surrender to Lord Caitanya, and it was in response to their disrespect of Him that He decided to take *sannyāsa*. But the basic scriptures of Lord Caitanya's movement, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* are in Sanskrit, as are also most books written by Lord Caitanya's immediate followers.

Saṅkīrtana is a process of worshiping Kṛṣṇa by transcendental sound. And although Kṛṣṇa is *bhāva-grāhī* Janārdana, the Lord of all persons, who is happy to disregard the bad grammar and pronunciation of sincere devotees, why should our worship of Kṛṣṇa not be as nice as we can make it? Why not correctly pronounce the prayers and other texts we chant in Sanskrit as part of our *saṅkīrtana* worship, at least if learning how to pronounce correctly is not all that hard?

We should not think that Śrīla Prabhupāda considered reciting the Sanskrit texts in his books unimportant. Otherwise, why did he bother to include the Sanskrit in both Devanāgarī and a transliteration? Why did he institute responsive chanting of the verses in his *Bhāgavatam* classes? Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to chant these verses – chant them often, chant them to ourselves and in public lectures – and he wanted us to try our best to chant them correctly.

His Holiness Lokanātha Mahārāja is presenting simple instructions for improving our Sanskrit pronunciation. His explanations are clear, entertaining, and thorough, but not more thorough than necessary for the purpose at hand. Every devotee in ISKCON should gladly study Mahārāja's instructions with care and attention. The readers will get the benefit of learning right Sanskrit pronunciation from an expert communicator and an empowered worldwide preacher.

I am very glad to see this volume finally in print and wish it great success. I regret that someone did not write a book like this years ago. But Lokanātha Mahārāja has taken the initiative to do the needful, and now we should all be very thankful.

Gopīparāṇadhana Dāsa
Senior Sanskrit Editor, The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust
Director, Bhagavat Vidyāpīṭh, Govardhana

Introduction (*Bhumikā*)

The members of our International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON) are habituated to mispronouncing many Sanskrit words and mantras. ISKCON leaders now recognize this problem and feel the need for a detailed Sanskrit pronunciation guide.

The books of our founder-*ācārya*, Śrīla Prabhupāda, contain exact transliterations of Sanskrit words, but evidently a tradition of mispronunciation has developed, passed down in a “*paramparā* of errata.” If we try to correct this problem by introducing some standards, the mistakes will diminish.

There is a game played in kindergarten called Chinese Whispers. A child whispers something into another child’s ear, and then the second child whispers it in the next child’s ear and that one whispers it in a fourth child’s ear until finally the last child says aloud what was heard at the end. Most often, this is different from what the first child said. Similarly, in a hundred years, our devotees may have different mantras if our tradition of mispronunciation goes uncorrected.

Some words that devotees mispronounce do change the meaning of or give the opposite meaning to a word. This can lead to philosophical misunderstandings. So we have to stop mispronunciation, go back to basics, and hear and say things right. Some senior devotees suggested printing a companion to our standard songbook that points out mispronunciations of verses and how they should be corrected. This book will serve that purpose, for there is a chapter devoted to avoiding common mistakes in reciting our daily prayers.

यद्यपि बहुनाधीषे,
तथापि पठ पुत्र व्याकरणम् ।
स्वजनः स्वजनो मा भूत्,
सकलं शकलं सकृत् शकृत् ॥

yadyapi bahunādhīṣe
tathāpi patha putra vyākaraṇam
svajānaḥ svajāno mā bhūt
sakalam śakalam sakṛt śakṛt

A child practicing phonetics should be trained not to mispronounce even a single syllable; otherwise, the meaning can completely change.

- One would not want to call *svājana* (the family and kinsmen) *śvajana* (dogs).
- Mispronouncing *sakala* as *śakala* changes the meaning from “the complete whole” to “just a part.”
- “*Sakṛt* means “once” and *śakṛt* means “excrement.”

ISKCON is not a new movement. We are *rūpānugas*, following in the footsteps of Rūpa Goswāmī and other great *ācāryas* in our *sampradāya*. To represent them, it is essential that we correctly pass on our oral tradition. If we do not utter mantras as they are, but instead impart distorted versions of them, then a corrupted form of the original scriptural knowledge will be

conveyed to future generations. Our tradition stresses the importance of hearing, but we must hear correctly. If the source is impure or unchaste and the receivers transmit that flawed rendering, an *apa-sampradāya*, or deviant tradition, will form.

Such an *apa-sampradāya* of mispronunciation arose in the very early days of our movement, when there were only a few devotees who could correctly pronounce Sanskrit words and *śloka*s and there were no songbooks that devotees could refer to. When I joined ISKCON in the early 1970s, the devotees had to learn by hearing from others, who had also learned by hearing from others. Playing the *mṛdaṅga* (drum) was learned in the same way. Previously no one was trained to play. The older devotees would just play, imitating what they had heard from other untrained devotees, and as a result they invented *mṛdaṅga* beats.

At that time we did not know whether what we learned was proper or not, and whatever pronunciation, songs, and *mṛdaṅga* beats we did learn, either by imitating Prabhupāda or the early devotees, eventually became the standard. Unfortunately, many such incorrect standards were continued. Many devotees think, "This was the way they were saying it in the early days of ISKCON, so it must be right."

This is not necessarily anyone's fault. Nevertheless, the Society is only slowly progressing out of its early days. My concern is to avoid the continuation of mispronunciation. The senior devotees and especially the leaders and Prabhupāda's disciples should carefully learn to properly pronounce Sanskrit so that wrong standards are not passed down to the generations to follow.

When ISKCON was new, Indians appreciated the Western devotees and overlooked their mispronunciations of Sanskrit words, just as adults appreciate the imperfect speech of children. As children mature, of course, their language improves. ISKCON has progressed tremendously, and now its members should improve their recitation of Sanskrit. The credibility of our preachers will be greatly augmented by their learning to accurately chant Sanskrit. As Prabhupāda said:

"And wherever you go, in any part of the world, if you can chant this mantra, oh, you'll be received like God. It is so nice. And in India they'll actually receive you like gods if you chant this mantra. They will offer their respects, so many. *Veda-mantra*."

Lecture, April 20, 1972

There is a huge difference between a new devotee's mispronunciations and a senior devotee's mispronunciations. If a new devotee mispronounces your name, you don't mind, but it is absurd if after a few decades he still mispronounces your name. As we mature, we are expected to learn more intensely. Something not considered offensive in the beginning of spiritual life is considered an offense later on.

We learn from a passage in Hari Śauri Prabhu's biography of Śrīla Prabhupāda that Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to correctly pronounce the Sanskrit words:

Moving over to sit at his desk, he asked, "So, what is your name?" Certainly he must have already heard it many times over the last few days, so perhaps it was his way of making me feel more comfortable. It relieved my embarrassment, making me feel that he is getting to know me on a more personal basis. "Arrey Sawry, Śrīla Prabhupāda," I said in my broad Northern English brogue. "Haree Showree," Prabhupāda corrected in his elegant Bengali accent. Giving me a warm smile, he asked for some water...

Transcendental Diary, Part I

Mispronunciation is nothing to feel ashamed of. Learning a foreign grammar is difficult, and learning to pronounce a foreign language is even more difficult. This is because

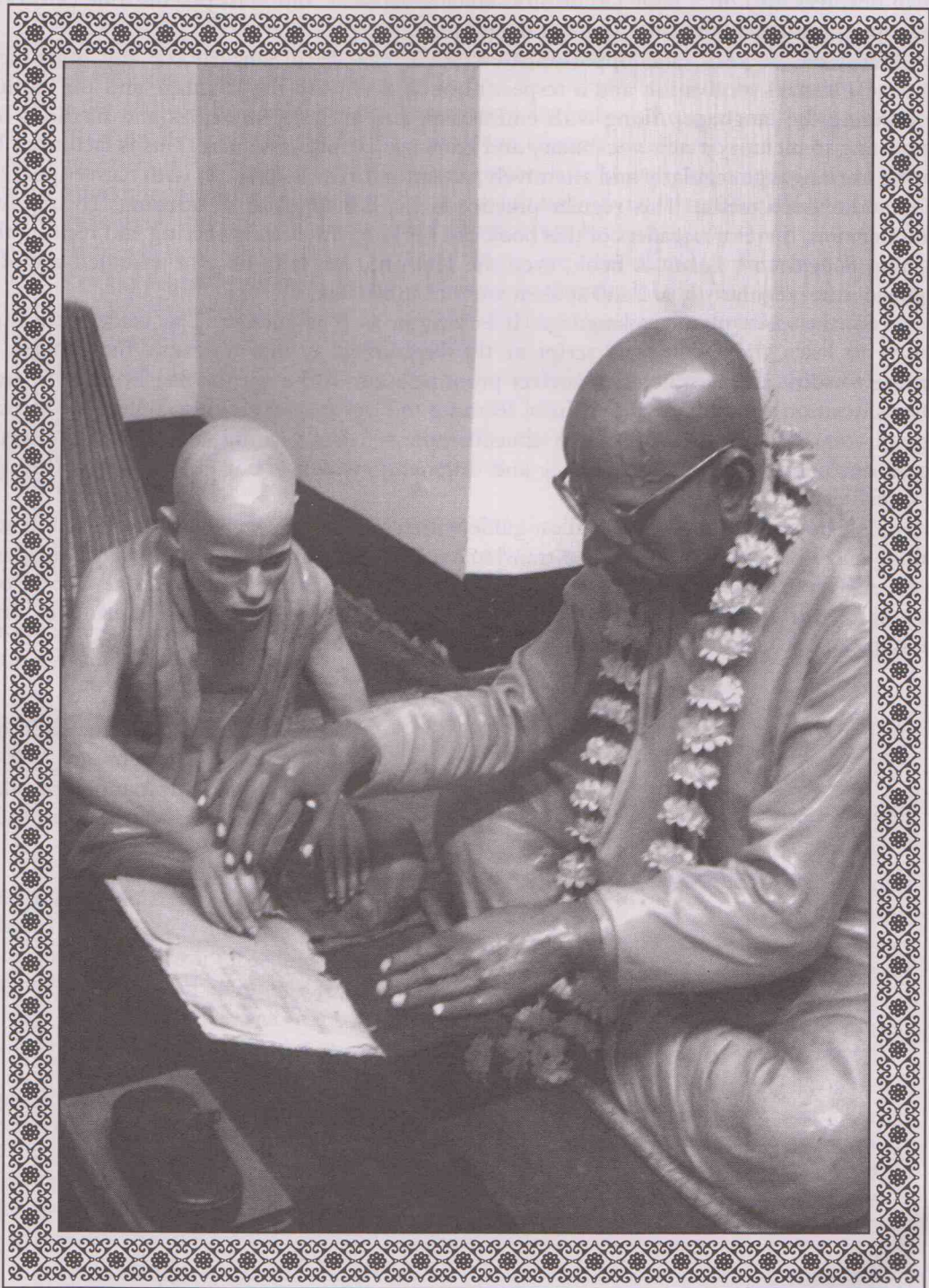
our tongues are conditioned by our native language. These differences in pronunciation account for the difficulties that foreign devotees have in pronouncing Sanskrit properly. Many Indian devotees also do a poor job of pronouncing Sanskrit. But with practice one can learn the proper pronunciation of the Sanskrit language.

Any eager, keen, and opportunistic student can learn Sanskrit (or any other new language). It takes motivation and a respectful outlook toward the language and the culture surrounding the language. Along with enthusiasm and attitude, strategies and methods for committing to memory a new vocabulary and grammar are also essential. This is facilitated by hearing the language regularly and attentively, either in direct association with native speakers or by audio/video media. This regular practice is the best method of learning. To improve pronunciation, therefore, readers of this book can begin by attentively hearing and reciting the morning *Bhāgavatam śloka*s. A book, even the best one, can help only in a limited way if a language is not regularly heard and spoken without inhibition.

Sanskrit is a phonetic language. It is written as it is spoken. The readers are thus advised to learn the Devanāgarī script at the beginning, as this quickens the process of learning Sanskrit and also helps in correct pronunciation. Although the Sanskrit can be read in transliteration, an additional benefit of learning the Devanāgarī script is being able to read original texts that are unavailable in transliterations. Also, reading the Devanāgarī script affords one additional spiritual potency and originality, which is not fully achieved through the transliteration.

We hope that this pronunciation guide will help you improve your pronunciation and enable you to better comprehend the translations and deep meanings of Vaiṣṇava songs and verses. As Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu says in the Preface, a book like this should have come out years ago. I originally planned to publish it in 1996, as a Centennial offering to Śrīla Prabhupāda, but “a good thing takes time” as he said. So it has been finished only now.

Lokanātha Svāmī
February 7, 2009
Nityānanda Trayodaśī
Aravade, Maharashtra, India



1

Śrīla Prabhupāda on Sanskrit (*Samskṛta Śikṣāmṛtam*)

1.1 The Glories of Sanskrit (*Samskṛta Māhātmya*)



Śrīla Prabhupāda was keen on publishing his books at a high academic standard. He specifically instructed the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust to include a Sanskrit or Bengali pronunciation guide, an index of verses, and other features to assist readers in accurately reciting the verses in “every volume”.

“Every volume of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as well as *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* must be fully complete with an index, list of references, glossary, Sanskrit pronunciation guide, and index of Sanskrit (or Bengali) verses. This will be best.”

Letter, February 6, 1975

Sanskrit is a highly “reformed” language. Every word is pronounced exactly according to its spelling. In English, some words are phonetically ambiguous (e.g., “c” in chair is pronounced differently than the “c” in cat), but in Sanskrit every syllable and every consonant and vowel accurately and precisely represent a unique sound.

“Therefore it is called Sanskrit. [In] Sanskrit everything is reformed. It is not by that b-u-t but, p-u-t put, if you say ‘u’, then you must say b-u-t but and p-u-t put but not that sometimes put sometimes but, no, that will not be allowed in Sanskrit. The pronunciation must be regular. You cannot change, Sanskrit means reformed language.”

Lecture, April 23, 1972

In lectures Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes stressed the vague and variegated phonology of the “whimsical” English language, and sometimes he pointed out that the definition of the word “Sanskrit” is “refined” or “perfect”.

“The real meaning of ‘Sanskrit’ is ‘reform.’ It is not whimsical, just like in the English language, ‘b-u-t but, p-u-t put.’ It is not like that. Every word, every syllable has a symbolic meaning.”

Lecture, January 19, 1969

Not only the phonetics, but the rhyme of Sanskrit verses, because of the very strict form of the *śloka*s, is unparalleled.

Syāmasundara: Today when we were looking at the Sanskrit *śloka*s, I suddenly realized that this very strict form of *śloka* made it easy for the people to memorize.

Prabhupāda: Yes, oh yes. That Sanskrit *śloka* is so made that if you repeatedly chant five, six times, it will be memorized. And once it is memorized, you will never forget it.

Syāmasundara: Then you can pass it down and you don’t have to write it.

Prabhupāda: No. That requires only memory. That was the system, *śruti*. Once hears from the spiritual master, it is memorized for good. The memory was so sharp, and the memory was prepared by this *brahmacarya*.

Śyāmasundara: And the grammatical rules are so arranged to make it easy to memorize – natural rhythm.

Prabhupāda: Natural, quite natural, natural rhythm. It's not artificial.

Śyāmasundara: Whereas our Western poems are all so many different lines, lengths, rhythms. You can't remember them.

Prabhupāda: There is no standard. There is *Sāhitya Darpaṇa*, there is a book. So many words; the first pronunciation five, second pronunciation seven, like that. There are different kinds of *sandhi* [ways of conjoining words].

Śyāmasundara: So it's meant for hearing and memorizing.

Vedabase; no date supplied

Modern languages are creations of mankind and are thus imperfect, but Sanskrit emanates directly from a spiritual source, and is also spoken in *deva nagara*, or the planets of the demigods.

"Devanāgarī. This language is spoken in the higher planetary system. Even in *Vaikuṇṭha* this language is spoken. Devanāgarī, *deva nagara*. Just like Tokyo is a Japan *nagara*; similarly, *nagara* means 'city' and the citizens are called *nagarī*, 'those who live in the city.' They are called *nagarī*. So, Devanāgarī. These letters are called Devanāgarī.

Lecture, April 23, 1972

The poetic, beautiful Sanskrit language is known as the "language of the gods."

"Yes, Sanskrit is spoken not only on *Kṛṣṇa-loka* but also in higher planets of the demigods. It is called the language of God and the demigods. It was spoken also on this planet. When the people were all godly they used to speak in Sanskrit. Sanskrit is the origin of all languages of the civilized people. It is most perfect, not only descriptive; the word 'Sanskrit' means 'the most perfect.' Because not a single word you can pronounce without having a bona fide principle. It is not like the English language: 'but/put' with an irrational difference in pronunciation; no principles. Sanskrit is not like that. Therefore it is perfect. It is not whimsical. English poetry has one line one-inch long; next line 600 inches long. Sanskrit is not like that. There are strict principles, and it is so beautiful. Therefore in Sanskrit no ordinary man can become a poet. No other language of the world can be compared with it. No other language of the world is so perfect as Sanskrit. Any language near to Sanskrit language is nearer to perfection. Sanskrit is pronounced the same way here or there, it is standard."

Letter, February 1, 1968

Although it may take long to master Sanskrit, once it is learned, the student passes through "the gateway to education."

"Anyone serious about studying the Sanskrit language should first learn grammar. It is said that simply to finish studying Sanskrit grammar takes at least twelve years, but once one learns the grammatical rules and regulations very nicely, all other scriptures or subject matters in Sanskrit are extremely easy to understand, for Sanskrit grammar is the gateway to education."

Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi 15.5, purport

By learning Sanskrit grammar, “all the *śāstras* are open.”

“Formerly Sanskrit schools first taught grammar very thoroughly, and this system continues even now. A student was supposed to study grammar carefully for twelve years in the beginning of his life, because if one is expert in the grammar of the Sanskrit language, all the *śāstras* are open to him. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was famous for teaching grammar to students, and therefore Keśava Kāśmīrī first referred to His position as a teacher of grammar.”

Cc. Ādi 16.31, purport

With knowledge of Sanskrit, a student can delve into the ocean of “Vedic literature without any translation.” Many Vedic texts are yet to be translated.

“... if you understand Sanskrit grammar, then you can read all the Vedic literature without any translation. Simply by studying. Therefore the Sanskrit scholars are first of all taught grammar. And when one is expert in reading grammar properly, then all Vedic literature becomes very simplified.”

Conversation, May 6, 1975

1.2

Vision for Sanskrit Education (*Samśkrta Vidyā Abhiprāya*)

Prabhupāda envisioned that his adult disciples and the *gurukula* children would both learn Sanskrit. He wanted it to be a “compulsory” element of the *gurukula* curriculum.

“Sanskrit should be compulsory for all our children to learn, and anyone who has an elementary knowledge of the alphabet and grammar can begin to teach it.”

Letter, February 28, 1972

Prabhupāda was displeased at the mispronunciation of Sanskrit by *gurukula* children, and he insisted that the teachers “teach the children perfectly Sanskrit and English.”

“You should teach the children perfectly Sanskrit and English instead of spoiling time and money. The children cannot pronounce correctly the Sanskrit. Let them read it correctly; that is wanted first. They must pronounce nicely English and Sanskrit. The English is no difficulty. If you can do this, then your education is all right. . . . You may introduce contests, but if the children and also the older devotees cannot pronounce Sanskrit correctly, it is all a useless waste of time.”

Letter, September 3, 1974

Prabhupāda also wanted his disciples to hear and repeat the verses of the *Bhāgavatam* after understanding the pronunciation.

“This is our program. We have come here not to exploit your country, but to give you something substantial. This is the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. So read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, pronounce these verses very nicely. Therefore we’re repeating. You hear the records and try to repeat.”

Lecture, April 14, 1973

1.3 Strategy & Implementation (Prayoga)

Every *brāhmaṇa* was trained in the “science to pronounce a Vedic mantra.”

“It is the practice of the *brāhmaṇas* conversant with the science to pronounce a Vedic mantra in the right accent. The combination of the mantra and Sanskrit words must be chanted with the right pronunciation; otherwise, it will not be successful.”

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.13.27, purport

Sometimes Prabhupāda would dedicate a substantial amount of time during his lecture to arduously train disciples in the brahminical practice of invoking “transcendental vibration” by chanting a verse.

Pradyumna [chanting verse]: *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Devotees: *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Prabhupāda: It is sandhi? *Na ghaṭeta artha.* It has been lost? *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ. Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.* Again, recite the whole śloka.

Pradyumna [devotees repeating]: *śrī-śuka uvāca, ātma-māyām rte rājan, parasyānubhavātmanah, na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ svapna-draṣṭur ivāñjasā.*

Prabhupāda: Now read again.

Pradyumna: Whole thing?

Prabhupāda: No, this same verse. Practice it. In this way you practice one mantra daily. Each mantra will purify you hundred yards daily. Go forward. These mantras are very powerful, given by Vyāsadeva Gosvāmī, vibrated. [. . .] So we should try to learn, get it by heart, at least one śloka, two ślokas in a week. And if we chant that – just like you are chanting so many songs – similarly, if we chant one or two verses of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, that will make you very quickly advanced for spiritual realization. We are therefore taking so much trouble to get this transliteration, the meaning, so that the reader may take advanced step, full advantage of the mantra. It is not that to show some scholarship, that “I know so much Sanskrit.” No. It is just offered with humility to learn the mantra, because one who will chant the mantra – mantras are all transcendental vibration. Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is the *mahā-mantra*, but they are also mantras, all the verses from the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, spoken by Kṛṣṇa, spoken by Vyāsadeva, an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. They’re also mantras, infallible instructions. So try to get it by heart, chanting. Either you chant by seeing the book or get it by heart, it is all the same. But try to chant one, two ślokas daily. Chant!

Pradyumna [chants with devotees responding]: *śrī-śuka uvāca, ātma-māyām rte rājan, parasyānubhavātmanah, na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Prabhupāda [correcting]: *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.* Like that. It is written like that?

Pradyumna: *Ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Prabhupāda: *Artha, artha* separated?

Pradyumna: No. Together. *Ghaṭetārtha.*

Prabhupāda: No. *Ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.* It should not be. *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.* Like that. *Tā* should be long. *Tā. Ghaṭeta artha-sambandhaḥ. Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.* Is that all right?

Pradyumna: Yes.

Prabhupāda: So pronounce like that.

Pradyumna: *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Prabhupāda: Loud. *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Pradyumna: *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Prabhupāda: Yes. *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Devotees: *Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ.*

Pradyumna: *Svapna-draṣṭur ivāñjasā.*

Prabhupāda: Oh. Again pronounce.

Pradyumna: Śrī-śuka uvāca [repeats verse].

Prabhupāda: Very important verse. Now we shall go to the words and meaning. Again recite. Śrī śuka uvāca. [Devotees repeat the verse.]

Prabhupāda: Once again. Do it again. [Pradyumna repeats the verse.]

Prabhupāda: Again. [Devotees repeat again.] Anyone can recite? All right. See the book and recite.

Śyāmasundara: Śrī-śuka uvāca, ātma-māyām rte rājan, parasyānubhavātmanah.

Prabhupāda: Parasyā. The transliteration is the long "a." You have seen? You just try to follow the transliteration. That will be easier.

Śyāmasundara: Parasyānu...

Prabhupāda: Parasyānubhava, bhavātmanah. Ātmā.

Śyāmasundara: Yes. Long "a". Ātmanah.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Now, beginning.

Śyāmasundara: Parasyānu . . .

Prabhupāda: No. First line. [Devotees repeating.]

Śyāmasundara: Śrī-śuka uvāca, ātma-māyām rte rājan, parasyānubhavātmanah.

Prabhupāda: Read it again.

Śyāmasundara: Śrī-śuka uvāca, ātma-māyām rte rājan, parasyānubhavātmanah na ghaṭetārtha.

Prabhupāda: Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ, svapna-draṣṭur ivāñjasā. Next. Next. You read. Go on. One after another. [Continues with a devotee reciting, and Prabhupāda correcting.] You read the transliteration. The thing is hearing the meter and repeat. That's all. The writing is already there, transliteration. Simply you have to hear the written. Just like you have chanted so many verses, songs, by hearing. The hearing is very important. A child learns another language simply by hearing, pronunciation, hearing. That is natural. If we hear one thing repeatedly, you will learn. You will learn. So one has to hear a little attentively. Then it will be easy. There is no difficulty. This is by hearing. So simply you have to hear. Therefore the whole Vedic śāstra is called śruti. It is a process of hearing. Go on. [Recitation continues.] Next. Each one of you. Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ svapna-draṣṭur ivāñjasā. What is the añjasā spelling? Devotee: l-v-a-n-j-a-s-a. Ivāñjasā.

Prabhupāda: Long a or short a?

Devotee: Long a.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Ivāñjasā. Añjasā. Añjasā means wholesale. Go on. [Recitation and corrections continue.] Na ghaṭeta artha- sambandhaḥ, combined together it becomes na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ. Tārtha. What is the spelling? Tārtha?

Devotee: T, long a, r-t-h-a.

Prabhupāda: Of tha? What is the . . .?

Devotee: T-a-r-t-h-a.

Prabhupāda: T-h-a. There must be r.

Pradyumna: Yes. Ghaṭetārtha. G-h-a-t-e-t-a-r...

Prabhupāda: T-a-r. Yes. T-a, artha. So you were missing that r. Na ghaṭetārtha-sambandhaḥ. All right. Next. [Recitation continues.] Get it next. Come here. So you have to study like that. So many śloka, I am taking so much labor. If you do not read it carefully. It is not for that I am making business, for selling only, and not for my students. You must all read like this, practice. Why so much trouble is being taken, word-to-word meaning and then transliteration? If you chant this mantra, that vibration will cleanse the atmosphere. Next chant. [Another devotee recites verse]. Very good. Next, next. Bhānu Prabhu [he recites]. Thank you very much. He has pronounced very nicely. So he will teach you. Yes. Next. [Another devotee recites.] Very good. [Another devotee recites verse.] Very good. Yes. In this way, each one of you, you chant and others will follow. Then in one or two days, you get the śloka by heart. You can chant. It is not difficult. Now read the word meanings and translation.

Karandhara: Śrī-śukaḥ uvāca—Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī said; ātma—the Supreme Personality of Godhead; māyām—the energy; rte—without; rājan—O King . . ."

Prabhupāda: Rājan. It is address, addressing. Nominative is rājā and addressive is rājan. Go on.

This long discussion took place during his *Bhāgavatam* class in Tokyo and is one of several instances when Prabhupāda engaged his disciples in understanding the Sanskrit grammar, the word-for-word pronunciation, and the translation. He wanted his disciples to memorize and recite verses. Śatadhanya Prabhu recalls another incident that took place in Tokyo in 1972:

“One day Śrīla Prabhupāda became very upset and spoke in a strong voice about how he had gone to all the trouble to include the Sanskrit *śloka*s and transliterations in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, but the devotees were neither showing interest nor learning the correct Sanskrit pronunciation; they were ignoring the Sanskrit he had placed in his books. He adamantly said that from now on every devotee in ISKCON must learn to pronounce the Sanskrit and understand the *śloka*s.

“For the next three weeks, during every *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class, Prabhupāda called upon each devotee to chant the *śloka* aloud. He would take ten or fifteen minutes with each person, teaching how to pronounce every Sanskrit syllable in the *śloka*. He taught seven or eight people every day.

“We were studying the Second Canto, and I remember even to this day the *śloka*s that Śrīla Prabhupāda drilled into us then, intensely, day after day. In fact, Pradyumna would tutor us during the day so that during the next morning we would not be embarrassed when we were called upon to chant. We were finally able to correctly chant all the *śloka*s in the chapter ‘Answers by Citing the Lord’s Version.’

“Before Prabhupāda left Tokyo, he announced that there would be a final exam. In the temple room at class time, Prabhupāda called on each devotee to recite the entire chapter in Sanskrit. Then Prabhupāda went through all the trouble to make corrections and explain how we did. This went on for hours, and he told each of us whether our recitation was good or needed more work. Somehow I was the last one to chant. I took my turn and recited the whole chapter. Then Prabhupāda looked at me and said, ‘First prize.’”

Prabhupāda wanted the members of ISKCON to become proficient in all areas of devotional service. Pronunciation of Sanskrit was no exception. Prabhupāda wanted his disciples to recite the scriptural verses “co-jointly as they chant [the] Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*.”

“I am happy to learn that you have begun to teach our students Sanskrit pronunciation. Please see that they can pronounce very nicely the Sanskrit verses in *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, *Īsopaniṣad*, and *Brahma-saṁhitā*, and teach them to chant co-jointly as they chant Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*.”

Letter, April 17, 1970

Every mantra of the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is *śabda-brahma*, or the Absolute Lord in His form of transcendental sound. If the mantra is poorly articulated, then the sound form of the Lord is disfigured. Instead of invoking the Lord, the distorted sound may invoke inauspiciousness. Therefore Prabhupāda emphasized that the devotees be educated “to pronounce in Sanskrit vibration”.

“Your teaching of Sanskrit pronunciation has been very much successful. I was just thinking of teaching our students the pronunciation of the Sanskrit verses in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, etc. and by Kṛṣṇa’s will you have already begun this. It will be a great help for me if the students are taught to pronounce in Sanskrit vibration. It will be another effect of transcendental sound vibration.”

Letter, April 5, 1970

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Letter, April 5, 1970

Along with musical accompaniment, devotees could “sing also, like songs, with tamboura” the Vedic mantras, suggested Prabhupāda.

“Yes. You can sing also very nicely, sing also, like songs, with tamboura. It is very nice [sings]: *cintāmaṇi-prakara-sadmasu kalpa*. Like that, it is very nice. In every temple there should be, one man should play on tamboura and chant. It requires nice pronunciation, and with the sound of tamboura. People are coming, offering *darśana*, and the singing is going on. That is the system in Indian temples. It immediately vibrates.”

Vedabase; no date supplied

In his strategic outlook for ISKCON’s future, Prabhupāda knew that Sanskrit education was an essential scholastic tool for the *gurukula* children. It would enable them to firmly and deeply grasp the Vedic literature. Thus, he ordered the *gurukula* educators to “purchase minimum fifty copies of the primary Sanskrit book.”

“One thing is, I have just returned from the Dallas Gurukula school, and the young students there require to learn Sanskrit language. So I think you may purchase minimum fifty copies of the primary Sanskrit book for learning Sanskrit language from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Chowpatty and send to Dallas school as soon as possible. Ask them if they will donate, but if they will not donate then purchase outright minimum fifty copies of the first grammar or primary book for learning Sanskrit at earliest age.”

Letter, September 13, 1972

Not only for the children but for his adult disciples, too, Prabhupāda encouraged Sanskrit classes, not for the purpose of becoming scholars, but to aid in their pronunciation of the mantras “in the proper accent.”

“Regarding Sanskrit class, it is very encouraging that Mr. Parikh is helping you in this connection, but the chief aim for learning Sanskrit would be how to pronounce the Sanskrit verses especially in our published books. . . . Therefore the main aim of this Sanskrit class should be how you can learn this chanting in the proper accent. It is not our aim to become a Sanskrit scholar.”

Letter, April 16, 1970

Anybody who reads Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books can learn something about Sanskrit by studying the word-for-word synonyms given for each verse. Prabhupāda was even willing to produce recordings of the verses to assist the readers in “pronouncing Sanskrit very nicely just by reading” his books.

“The linguistics professor has correctly remarked. It was my intention in presenting the books that anyone who would read would learn Sanskrit. For example almost all of my disciples are pronouncing Sanskrit very nicely just by reading my books. He says that there is no pronunciation guide, but it is there is it not? The best thing would be a recording.”

Letter, September 26, 1975

In the following conversation with Dr. Patel, Prabhupāda expresses his wish to explain the “*Bhagavad-gītā* grammar,” i.e., analysis of the Sanskrit syntax, to probe the meanings and formations of words and phrases in the *Gītā* verses. The ISKCON devotees Hariveṇu Dāsa and Yadu Dāsa have fulfilled Prabhupāda’s desire by authoring a book series called *Sanskrit*

Grammar in Bhagavad-gītā (see the Resources section for details). This series has detailed Sanskrit lessons, with practical demonstrations and examples from the verses of the *Gītā*.

Dr. Patel: ...teach Sanskrit through *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Prabhupāda: Oh, that we are doing. We give each word's meaning. Each word of any Sanskrit *śloka*, we give the meaning. That is right.

Dr. Patel: That is the way I learned myself.

Prabhupāda: If one is serious to learn, he can learn. There is no difficulty, no: *dharma-kṣetre kuru-kṣetre*. Now, if he inquires, "The word is *dharma-kṣetra*. Why it is written *kṣetre*?" then it is grammar.

Dr. Patel: That is what I say. That is the way I learned.

Prabhupāda: So that, if he likes, he can learn it. *Saptamī, adhikarāṇa saptamī, sthāna, kṣetra, kṣetre, dharma-kṣetre*. If he simply tries to learn the nominative case, the objective case, then he'll learn.

Dr. Patel: [speaks something in Sanskrit]: Like that. All things in different ways.

Prabhupāda: *Saṅjaya uvāca*. It is nominative case. *Dharma-kṣetre kuru-kṣetre samavetāḥ*, this is plural number, *yuyutsavaḥ*, plural number. *Māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś caiva*. *Pāṇḍavāḥ* is plural number, and when it is added with *ca* it becomes *śca*. The *visarga*. In this way he can learn. *Eva*, again *sandhi*. *Māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś ca eva*.

Dr. Patel: My meaning was that. My idea was that.

Prabhupāda: Yes. So any serious student, he can learn at home. It is not very difficult. And after studying one or two or a dozen sentences, automatically, yes, he learns *sandhi*, he learns verb, he learns subject, object, everything. No time; otherwise, I would have made *Bhagavad-gītā* grammar. Yes.

Prabhupāda: That is what I really meant when I say that.

Prabhupāda: You can do that. You can do that. People will read it, *Bhagavad-gītā* grammar. On the *Bhagavad-gītā* teach them grammar. Just like Jīva Gosvāmī compiled *Hari-nāmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa*, similarly, you write. You have got both the knowledge, Sanskrit, and through English, *Bhagavad-gītā* grammar. People will take it. I have no time; otherwise, I would have done it. Simply nominative case, objective case, *śabda-rūpa*.

Conversation, April 13, 1976

1.4 Diacritics

Although Prabhupāda did not have enough time to write a complete Sanskrit grammar text, he did make sure to include the diacritic marks on the roman transliterations of the scriptural texts in his books. This assists the reader to "pronounce exactly" the Sanskrit verses.

Prabhupāda: You are reading the transcription or original verse?

Hṛdayānanda: Transcription.

Prabhupāda: So this transcription is quite helpful in pronunciation. Everything exact it is coming. The diacritic marks: follow, you can pronounce exactly.

Conversation, June 10, 1976

Because the Sanskrit alphabet has more letters than the English alphabet, to allow those with no knowledge of Sanskrit to correctly pronounce the words, scholars introduced a system of using a combination of the English alphabet and dots and lines called diacritical marks. These can be seen on the letters *ā, ī, ū, ṛ, ṅ, ñ, ś*, and others. The diacritics tell a reader exactly how the sound is to be produced. For example, the line over the top of the vowel *a* (*ā*) tells the reader to hold the vowel twice as long as normal. Prabhupāda instructed his

publishing house to strictly adhere to this academic standard of “correct diacritic spelling” in all his publications.

“In reply to Jayadvaita’s questions, henceforward the policy for using diacritic markings is that I want them used everywhere, on large books, small books, and also BTG. If there is any difficulty with the pronunciation, then after the correct diacritic spelling, in brackets the words “pronounced as _” may be written. So even on covers the diacritic markings should be used. We should not have to reduce our standard on account of the ignorant masses. Diacritic spelling is accepted internationally, and no learned person will even care to read our books unless this system is maintained.”

Letter, December 31, 1971

The diacritic system is known as the roman transliteration (“transliterate” means “to write in the corresponding letters of another alphabet”). It has been “internationally accepted by all scholars” for almost a hundred years. Each Sanskrit sound can be precisely transliterated without loss or ambiguity. All Prabhupāda’s books contain diacritics on the transliterated Sanskrit words.

“Diacritical marks must be maintained. These are internationally accepted by all scholars so I want that they should remain. If they are a botheration then leave out the Sanskrit words altogether or wherever there is a Sanskrit word, keep the English spelling for pronunciation (following it), e.g., Kṛṣṇa pronounced “Krishna”. If you are printing children’s books you may avoid Sanskrit words, but in my speeches there must be Sanskrit. This changing from one standard to another is not good, either avoid Sanskrit, put English pronunciation in brackets or use the diacritical marks whenever there is Sanskrit.”

Letter, December 28, 1971

The roman transliteration enables novice Sanskrit students to read Sanskrit without knowledge of the Devanāgarī script, provided they are willing to “learn the diacritic marks.”

“You practice this diacritic mark. English transliteration is there. It is not very difficult. Simply if you practice twice, thrice, four times, it will come exactly, the pronunciation. You have to learn the diacritic marks. Then it will be all right.”

Lecture, March 27, 1976

Without diacritics, a Sanskrit word written in roman letters will probably have an ambiguous pronunciation. The word meaning changes if one ignores the diacritics.

“Devotees call the temple in Belgium ‘Radhadesa,’ but there is no actual place like that with reference to the name Rādhā. The name comes from Rāḍhadeśa, a part of Bengal where the Ganges does not flow, the place where Nityānanda Prabhu appeared.”

—Bhakti Cāru Svāmī

The following excerpt from the *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* describes the place called Rāḍhadeśa:

*rādhe yānra janma kṛṣṇadāsa dvijavara
śrī-nityānandera teṅho parama kinkara*

SYNONYMS

rādhe—in West Bengal; *yānra*—whose; *janma*—birth; *kṛṣṇadāsa*—Kṛṣṇadāsa; *dvija-vara*—the best brāhmaṇa; *śrī-nityānandera*—of Nityānanda Prabhu; *teṅho*—he; *parama*—first-class; *kinkara*—servant.

TRANSLATION

The twenty-first devotee of Śrī Nityānanda in Bengal was Kṛṣṇadāsa Brāhmaṇa, who was a first-class servant of the Lord.

PURPORT

In this verse the word *rāḍhe* refers to Rāḍhadeśa, the part of Bengal where the Ganges does not flow.

Cc. Ādi 11.36

In this example, by ignoring the diacritics, devotees changed the word Rāḍhadeśa (“part of Bengal where the Ganges does not flow”) to Radhadesa (intending it to mean “the country of Rādhā”), which has a completely different meaning. By ignoring the dot (under *ḍha* in Rāḍhadeśa) etc., devotees changed the meaning of the word. A dot can change a lot.

1.5 Benefits of Pure Pronunciation (*Śuddha Uccāraṇam Lābha*)

In regard to preaching programs, devotees know that the pious Indians are naturally attracted to the pure recitation of Vedic mantras. If preachers can impress the public with spectacular recitation of “*Veda*-mantra,” they will be “received like God.”

“And wherever you go, in any part of the world, if you can chant this mantra, oh, you’ll be received like God. It is so nice. And in India he’ll actually receive like Gods if you chant this mantra. They will so offer their respects, so many. *Veda*-mantra.”

Lecture, April 20, 1972

Just like the Lord’s holy names, verses of scripture are also transcendental vibrations. Their pure recitation brings all auspiciousness. By purely chanting mantras, “wherever you go, you will be all respected,” Prabhupāda told his disciples.

Prabhupāda: ...transcendental vibration. So everything is there. If you do not practice, what can I do? The transliteration is there, the accent is there, and now our Pradyumna is there also. Utilize time; become attracted. As Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive, you become attracted at least to some. Kṛṣṇa is all-attractive. You cannot become all-attracted. At least you become attracted to some. They are becoming attracted by good apartment, by shaving the beard, like that. You told me they are trying to remain young?

Sudāmā: Yes, yes. You have given us so many ślokas. Now we have so much to start. So many mantras, *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Īsopaniṣad*.

Prabhupāda: Huge. So why you are not utilizing this facility?

Sudāmā: We’re missing the point.

Prabhupāda: This evening you will have to chant these verses and you will explain. Who will explain? You will explain? That’s all right. Then I shall speak. First of all let them hear from my disciples, then I shall speak. Is it all right?

Sudāmā: Yes, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Prabhupāda: So now practice whole day how to pronounce these ślokas.

Pradyumna: Better all chant.

Prabhupāda: Yes. And explain. Practice like this. Then wherever you go, you will be all respected.

Lecture, April 25, 1972

Prabhupāda desired that his *saṅkīrtana* devotees uniquely “demonstrate the chanting of the mantras” to attract the public to Kṛṣṇa.

“When we lead our world Saṅkīrtana Party, at that time, if we can demonstrate the chanting of the mantras as they are stated in *Īsopaniṣad*, *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Brahma-saṁhitā*, that will be our unique position.”

Letter, April 16, 1970

Prabhupāda did not write books just for distribution. He also wanted his disciples to study them and practice “resounding the mantras.”

Prabhupāda: *Bhāgavata*? So from the very beginning, *om namo bhagavate, janmādy asya yataḥ*.

[*Pradyumna chants the verse one word at a time, with the devotees and Śrīla Prabhupāda repeating, until Śrīla Prabhupāda stops him at the word abhijñāḥ.*]

Prabhupāda [*Chants the verse one word at a time, with devotees repeating*]: Like that.

Pradyumna: *Janmādy asya yato 'nvayād*.

Prabhupāda: No, first of all let them practice. [*Chants the verse one word at a time, with devotees repeating.*] Read like that.

[*Pradyumna chants the verse one word at a time, with devotees and Śrīla Prabhupāda repeating.*]

Prabhupāda: Again. [*Pradyumna repeats, as above.*] Next you. [*Devotee recites whole verse one word at a time with devotees and Śrīla Prabhupāda repeating.*] Hm. Kīrtanānanda Mahārāja. [*Kīrtanānanda recites with the devotees and Śrīla Prabhupāda repeating.*] This word *abhijñāḥ* or *abhijñāḥ* [*he pronounces it differently*] both ways you can pronounce. So it is easier for you, as it is spelling *abhijñāḥ*, or *abhijñāḥ*, as you like. Yes. [*Kīrtanānanda continues and the devotees repeat.*] Thank you. Viṣṇujana Mahārāja [*recitation takes place*]. Karandhara Prabhu [*recitation takes place*]. You [*a devotee recites*]. Any more? Anyone else? Hm. [*Śrīla Prabhupāda chants the verse twice, one line at a time, and devotees repeat.*]

Prabhupāda: So, if you chant these mantras, at least one in one day, your life will be glorious. This mantra, *bhāgavata-mantra*, not only *Bhāgavata*, every Vedic literature is a mantra. Transcendental sound. So practice resounding this mantra. So we have taken so much labor to put in diacritic marks, all the words, word meaning; utilize it. Don't think that these books are only for sale. If you go to sell these books and if some customer says, “You pronounce it,” then what you will do? Then he will understand, “Oh, you are for selling, not for understanding.” What do you think? So therefore it is necessary now, you have got nice books, each and every *śloka*, verse, should be pronounced. Therefore we have given this original verse in Sanskrit, its transliteration with diacritic mark. These marks are universally accepted amongst the scholars. So all the scholars of Sanskrit, they agreed to use this mark for pronouncing Sanskrit language. Sanskrit language is very important, honored all over the world. So if, those who are Indians, especially present in this meeting, that if you want to glorify your country, then you present this Vedic literature. I am therefore so much laboring hard that we, before my leaving this body, I may give you some books that you can enjoy after my death. So utilize it. Utilize it. Read every *śloka* nicely, try to understand the meaning, discuss amongst yourselves. *Nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā*. That is our mission.

Lecture, July 6, 1972

In Jhansi, where Prabhupāda started the League of Devotees, his very first disciple, Dr. Ācārya Prabhākara Miśra, was a college principal and Sanskrit scholar. Prabhupāda envisioned an institute for scholars from all countries to “learn and read Sanskrit.”

“As such it is now necessary that men of culture all over the world may learn and read Sanskrit, the mother of all other languages of the Aryan stock. The League of Devotees, therefore, will maintain a Sanskrit academy and a degree college especially for the purpose of disseminating the benefit of this great language to all. Scholars from all countries will be welcome to remain as inmates at the institute.”

Even after establishing the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness twenty years after preaching in Jhansi, Prabhupāda still contemplated launching “a bona fide language school” and paying Sanskrit scholars to train his disciples in Hindi and Sanskrit. He thought this would be a great aid in their preaching mission, especially in India.

“We want to introduce this program of teaching our students Hindi and Sanskrit for two reasons. First of all, as I have already explained in a previous letter, if we can establish a bona fide language school then our American and European disciples can acquire student visas for coming to India. This will solve our visa problem. Secondly, if our students can actually preach in Hindi, periodically quoting Sanskrit, it will be a very good credit for us and very respectfully received by the Indian people. The curriculum can be two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening and the pundits can be paid Rs. 200 per month. Our students, however, must be prepared to apply themselves and actually learn the languages.”

Letter, December 21, 1973

Other benefits of purely uttering Sanskrit are cultural and physical. To speak Sanskrit means to be refined and cultured by definition. As the language of the gods, it brings divine grace. The Sanskrit sounds create beneficial vibrations for the *nāḍīs* (the pathways of everyone’s life air) and strengthen the nervous system, thereby contributing to good health.

1.6 The Lord Accepts the Motive (*Bhāva-grāhī Janārdana*)

One of the first arguments devotees offer against improving their pronunciation is: “Kṛṣṇa is in my heart, and therefore He knows what I really mean to say; the Lord takes only the essence of a devotee’s attitude. He is glorified as *bhāva-grāhī janārdana*.”

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead is known as *bhāva-grāhī janārdana* because He takes only the essence of a devotee’s attitude. If a devotee sincerely surrenders, the Lord, as the Supersoul in everyone’s heart, immediately understands this. Thus even though, externally, a devotee may not render full service, if he is internally sincere and serious the Lord welcomes his service nonetheless. Thus the Lord is known as *bhāva-grāhī janārdana* because He takes the essence of one’s devotional mentality.”

Bhāg. 8.23.2, purport

This is the Lord’s merciful nature. He pardons the mistakes in the “grammatical composition” of a devotee’s prayers, if the intent and service attitude is “pure for serving Kṛṣṇa.”

“So even we offer Kṛṣṇa prayer with broken languages, because Kṛṣṇa is Absolute, Kṛṣṇa will accept it. *Bhāva-grāhī janārdana*. Kṛṣṇa sees how much your heart is pure for serving Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa does not see the wording, the grammatical composition of your prayer.”

Lecture, May 6, 1973

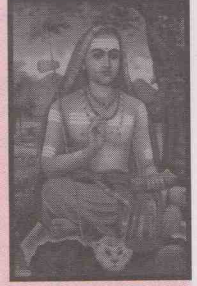
The story of the illiterate South Indian *brāhmaṇa* of Śrī Raṅgam teaches us a similar lesson. His fellow *brāhmaṇas* in his village laughed at him and made fun of his incorrect pronunciation of *Bhagavad-gītā śloka*s. But because of his intense *bhāva* (ecstatic love) for the Lord, he was shedding tears of ecstasy while thinking of the Supreme Lord driving the chariot

of His devotee, Arjuna. As a result, the *brāhmaṇa* received the *darśana* (audience) of Lord Caitanya.

With these arguments, one may justify laziness as being an indication of devotion: “I don’t need to learn Sanskrit grammar and pronunciation.” After all, Śaṅkarācārya has said:

भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं मूढमते
सम्प्राप्ते सन्निहिते काले नहि नहि रक्षति दुकृञ् करणे

*bhaja govindam bhaja govindam
govindam bhaja mūdha-mate
samprāpte sannihite kāle
nahi nahi rakṣati dukṛñ karāṇe*



Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda, you fool! Your grammatical word jugglery will not save you at the time of death.

Dvādaśa Manjarīka Stotra

Prabhupāda was tolerant of our mistakes. The Vaiṣṇavas are addressed as *sāra-grāhī*, i.e., they accept only the essence and do not consider the mistakes in an offering. *Bhāva-grāhī* Prabhupāda accepted a pure service attitude. He forgave our mispronunciation of “guru” as “goru” (meaning “cow”) and took “the meaning of guru and not goru, even if it is spoken as goru”.

“You are chanting, the mantras, but because it is not your language, sometimes it appears broken. Just like guru. Sometimes you say ‘goru.’ ‘Goru’ means cow and ‘guru’ means spiritual master. So the difference in meaning is vast. The spiritual master is not a cow or a bull [laughs]. Because it is not your language, it does not matter, because *bhāva-grāhī janārdana*, Kṛṣṇa, is within you. He knows what you want to chant. Therefore He takes the meaning of guru and not goru, even if it is spoken as goru. I don’t take offense because I know that your desire is something else. I do not protest that you are addressing me goru. I am not goru. So that is not a fault. Similarly, it is said *yasmin prati-slokaṁ abaddhavaty api*. If somebody does not know how to spell, how to say, but his idea is there, *abaddhavaty api*, because he wants to chant the holy name of the Lord, *nāmāny anantasya, ananta*, His name is being chanted.”

Lecture, June 10, 1969

Here Prabhupāda refers to Nārada’s famous instruction to Vyāsadeva:

तद्वाग्विसर्गो जनताघविप्र्लवो
यस्मिन् प्रतिश्लोकमबद्धवत्यपि ।
नामान्यनन्तस्य यशोऽङ्कितानि यत्
शृण्वन्ति गायन्ति गृणन्ति साधवः ॥ ११ ॥

*tad-vāg-visargo janatāgha-viplavo
yasmin prati-slokaṁ abaddhavaty api
nāmāny anantasya yaśo 'ṅkitāni yat
śṛṇvanti gāyanti gṛṇanti sādhanavah*



That literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, and pastimes of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed

toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Transcendental literature, although imperfectly composed, is heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.

Bhāg. 1.5.11

The Lord gives preference to “the motive, not the pronunciation of the language.”

“Yes, you can sing prayers in Sanskrit, but prayers in English can be also pronounced because the Lord accepts the motive, not the pronunciation of the language. He wants to see spiritual motive. Even if some effectiveness is lost in translation, if the motive is there, it will make no difference.”

Letter, January 2, 1968

The Lord in our heart, Paramātmā, witnesses all our mind's acts. If we just pronounce the name of the Lord with the tongue, but do not meditate upon Him within our mind, then the effectiveness of our chanting is reduced. But if we are sincerely chanting the Lord's names, “even it is not... perfectly pronounced, still, God will understand.”

“Because God will take your mind, not your pronunciation. If you mean to pronounce God's name, even it is not, I mean to say, formally or perfectly pronounced, still, God will understand that you are trying to chant His name. That is your perfection.”

Lecture, October 9, 1969

These statements are often misconstrued to justify improper pronunciation. However, the pure devotee actually wishes to offer the best service to the Lord. Reciting the pastimes of the Lord in the form of scriptural verses is also devotional service, and if our motive is to please the Lord, then we should endeavor to perform this service to the best of our capacity. If one knows the proper method, one should perform the service appropriately. Prabhupāda makes this point in the following letter: “everything perfect for Kṛṣṇa.”

therefore it remains potent despite mistakes in grammar, spelling, etc. But this type of translation may only be allowed if there is no other way to correct it, then it is all right. But if you know the correct make it perfect. That is our philosophy: everything perfect for

Letter, January 20, 1972

1.7 Gravity of Mantra Recitation (Mantroccāraṇam Gambhīrtā)

Priests would ensure that their *manthroccāraṇam* (pronunciation of Vedic mantras) was precise by testing sacrificial hymns on animals. If the sacrificed animal regained a new life, the pronunciation was verified to be correct (Bhāg. 4.19.27, purport). If the pronunciation was even slightly flawed, the result of the sacrifice could be reversed, as in the case of Tvaṣṭā's sacrifice.

Although this incident depicts an extreme situation, it demonstrates the importance of pronunciation, which can cause even life or death. If mantras are improperly chanted, they can yield an opposite result. Tvaṣṭā wanted to produce a creature to kill Indra, but he chanted one syllable long instead of short, so the sacrifice produced Vṛtrāsura, whom Indra killed.

हतपुत्रस्ततस्त्वष्टा जुहावेन्द्राय शत्रवे ।
इन्द्रशत्रो विवर्धस्व माचिरं जहि विद्विषम् ॥ ११ ॥

*hata-putras tatas tvaṣṭā
juhāvendrāya śatrave
indra-śatro vivardhasva
mā ciram̐ jahi vidviṣam*

TRANSLATION

After Viśvarūpa was killed, his father, Tvaṣṭā, performed ritualistic ceremonies to kill Indra. He offered oblations in the sacrificial fire, saying, “O enemy of Indra, flourish to kill your enemy without delay.”

PURPORT

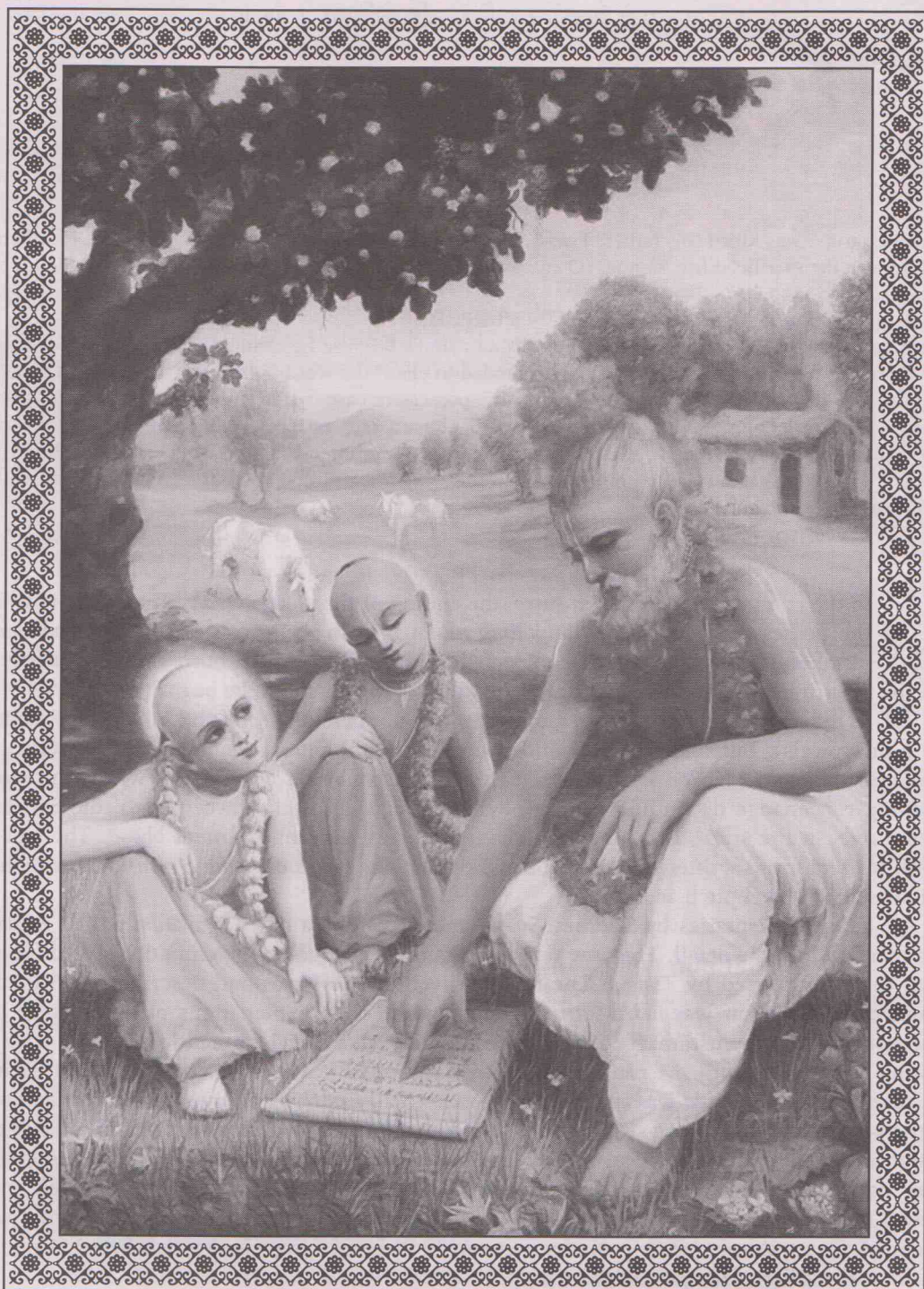
There was some defect in Tvaṣṭā's chanting of the mantra because he chanted it long instead of short, and therefore the meaning changed. Tvaṣṭā intended to chant the word *indra-śatro*, meaning, “O enemy of Indra.” In this mantra, the word *indra* is in the possessive case (*ṣaṣṭhi*), and the word *indra-śatro* is called a *tat-puruṣa* compound (*tatpuruṣa-samāsa*). Unfortunately, instead of chanting the mantra short, Tvaṣṭā chanted it long, and its meaning changed from “the enemy of Indra” to “Indra, who is an enemy.” Consequently instead of an enemy of Indra's, there emerged the body of Vṛtrāsura, of whom Indra was the enemy.

Bhāg. 6.9.11

In the compound word *indra-śatro*, the ending of the word *śatro* is uttered short when it is in the possessive case (*ṣaṣṭhi*) and long when it is in the vocative case (*sambodhana*). Tvaṣṭā mistakenly uttered it long. He expected “Indra's killer” to be born from the sacrifice, but the *mantra* he uttered meant “Indra is the killer of the person to be born.”

In the above scenario, “long” and “short” do not denote *dirgha* and *hrasva* (see section 2.4.2 on vowels), but long (*udātta*) and short (*anudātta*) pitch accents on vowels (also in 2.4.2). Tvaṣṭā spoke Vedic Sanskrit (*vaidika bhāṣā* or *vaidika saṃskṛta*), in which the word meaning can change depending on the pitch in which a vowel is accented. Vedic Sanskrit occurs only in the *śruti-sāstra*, the four *Vedas*, and it is also called *śrauta bhāṣā*. The rest of Sanskrit literature is written in classical Sanskrit (*laukika bhāṣā* or *laukika saṃskṛta*), which is not altered by vowel pitch accents.

The commentaries by Śrīdhara Svāmī and Vaiṣṇīdhara on *Bhāgavatam* 6.9.11 explain this incident in more detail. They say that the version of the mantra given in 6.9.11 is different from the mantra used by Tvaṣṭā. The mantra given in the *Vedas* and described by Śrīdhara Svāmī and Vaiṣṇīdhara was *indra-śatrur vardhasva*, and their explanations of the mistake are based on this. It was customary to change a Vedic mantra a bit when mentioning *śruti* texts in writing because the audience did not necessarily have qualifications (*adhikāra*) in *śruti*. Hence the mantra from the *Veda* was changed in 6.9.11. Or it was changed owing to considerations of the verse meter. Hence we see that there is no actual vocative in the Vedic mantra. Śrīdhara Svāmī mentions that the mistake was in the *svaras*, vowel pitch accents. As far as the letters were concerned, they were accurately chanted. The mistake in the *svaras* (vowel pitch accents) was that he chanted “*indra*” with the *udātta* accent, which changed it from what was intended (a *tatpuruṣa* meaning “Indra's enemy”) to something else (a *bahuvrīhi*) meaning “Indra is the killer of the person to be born.”



2

Sanskrit Phonetics (*Varṇa Śikṣā*)

2.1 The Sanskrit Language (*Samśkrta Bhāṣā*)

Pāṇini refers to Sanskrit (*saṁskṛta*) in his *Aṣṭādhyāyī* by the word *bhāṣā*, which means “language.” The word *saṁskṛta* means “the formally perfected language.” Most Hindus consider Sanskrit the original language in the universe and thus the mother of all languages. It is regarded by scholars as one of many Indo-European languages (English, Latin, Greek, etc.).

Indologists have said that Sanskrit was brought to India by the Aryans who invaded Southeast Asia, but this theory has been questioned. As suggested by the Harappan and Mohenjo Daro excavation sites, prior to the so-called Aryan invasion, the sophisticated and advanced Sindhu (pronounced “Hindu” by the invading Persians) or Indus Valley civilization prevailed in India from the middle of the third millennium B.C.

Sanskrit is a phonetic language, and all its sounds emanated from God according to the Vedic version. Sanskrit is thus sacred, as it is the language of God. At the beginning of creation, the Supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa imparted to Lord Brahmā knowledge of the *Vedas* and the *vedāṅgas* (which includes the *Śikṣā-vedāṅga*, dealing with Sanskrit pronunciation) as stated in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (1.1.1): *tene brahma hr̥daya ādi-kavaye*. Another reference for this history of the origin of Sanskrit is Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s *Harināmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa*, the first *sūtra* of which – *nārāyaṇādudbhūto’yaṁ varṇa-kramah* – means that the Sanskrit alphabet emanated from Nārāyaṇa (for Jīva Gosvāmī’s elaboration on this *sūtra*, see section 2.5.2). These Sanskrit sounds were revealed to Brahmā and issued forth from his speech, beginning with *praṇava*, the divine sound *omkāra* (*a-u-m*), the origin of all other articulated sounds (as our book cover illustrates). Lord Brahmā is the personal representative of Nārāyaṇa, who is the source of the transcendental sound *omkāra*, composed of the three original sounds of the alphabet: *a-u-m*. *Omkāra* is the secret essence and eternal seed of all Vedic hymns. From *omkāra*, Brahmā created all the other sounds of the alphabet.

Nowadays, several different alphabets are used in different parts of India for writing Sanskrit, but they all follow the same eternal pattern of the sounds of Sanskrit. Sanskrit was analyzed by Pāṇini in his *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, which is at least as old as the fifth century B.C. He says that Sanskrit comprises forty-eight letters, or *varṇas*, eternally indivisible sounds that are the fundamental units of the language: thirteen vowels and thirty-five consonants. These letters are *akṣara*, indestructible, which means that the sounds of the letters are never destroyed.

However, there are two aspects to this quality of nondestruction. First, the phonetic characteristics do not change; the letters always retain their sounds. In most languages, one letter can be pronounced two or three different ways. But the spelling and transcription of Sanskrit are exact and thus less prone to error than in other languages. Second, nondestruction of the *akṣaras* also means that the root sounds retain their individual meanings. For example, the word *guru* consists of the *akṣaras* “*gu*” and “*ru*”; among other things, “*gu*” means “darkness” and “*ru*” means “removal”. “*Guru*” thus stands for a teacher, one who dispels the darkness of the mind. Latin also has word roots, but in many languages, the concept of word roots may not exist.

There are two types of Sanskrit: Vedic and classical. Vedic Sanskrit is the dialect used in the four *Vedas*. Pāṇini defines Sanskrit phonology, morphology, and complex formations by categorizing the sounds and forms of Sanskrit in some of his four thousand *sūtras* or aphorisms. There are differences between Vedic and classical Sanskrit. For example, the *sandhi* rules are dissimilar (*sandhi* is the science of conjoining words). Additionally, accents are used in Vedic Sanskrit. The *Īsopaniṣad* is the only book translated by Prabhupāda that uses Vedic Sanskrit.

Sanskrit is easier to learn than modern languages for three reasons: (1) it has a systematic alphabet, (2) its grammar and syntax are constant and precise, and (3) the vocabulary is unchanging. Modern spoken languages have changing and varying vocabularies across the globe. English, for example, is quite different now from its Germanic source, since three-fourths of it consists of words borrowed from three hundred and fifty other languages. English spoken in African countries, with their multitude of languages (Nigeria has about four hundred), is greatly intermingled with words from the native languages.

The word “Sanskrit” originates from the term *saṁskṛta*, meaning “refined and syntactically accurate grammar” as opposed to *prākṛta*, which means “colloquial, vernacular.” Other Indo-Aryan languages and dialects were formed by deviation (*apabhraṁśa*) from the original Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit language of ancient India eventually produced derivatives. One of its forms, Pali, is said to have been used by Buddha for the propagation of his teachings in the sixth century B.C. Buddhist and Jain scriptures are written in both Pali and Sanskrit.

2.2 Six Limbs of the Vedas (Ṣaḍ-Vedāṅga)

The *Vedas* are the world's oldest literature. They are the basis of the transcendental knowledge and culture of India. The *Vedas* have six appendices, called the *ṣaḍ-vedāṅgas*, the six limbs of the *Vedas*.

शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दसां चयः ।
ज्योतिषामयनं चैव वेदाङ्गानि षडेव तु ॥

*śikṣā kalpo vyākaraṇaṁ
niruktaṁ chandasām ayaṇaḥ
jyotiṣāṁ ayanam caiva
vedāṅgāni ṣaḍ eva tu*



Śikṣā (phonetics), *kalpa* (ceremonial rituals), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *nirukta* (dictionary), *chandas* (verse meters), and *jyotiṣa* (astrology) are the six limbs of the *Vedas*.

—from the *Rg-veda Bhāṣya Bhūmikā* (the commentary and introduction by Sāyanācārya)

Four (*Śikṣā*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Chandas*, and *Nirukta*) of these six *vedāṅgas* relate to the Sanskrit language. The first *vedāṅga* teaches us principles for recitation of the *Vedas*. The sounds of Sanskrit are pure, and the words and sentences are refined by being subjected to analysis. The purposes of *Śikṣā* are to refine and clarify our pronunciation of Sanskrit so that it becomes a

means for our well-being. If sounds are well discerned and employed in speech, they will serve not only the purpose of communication but also inwardly cleanse us.

1. *Śikṣā*, the first *vedāṅga*, is the science of proper articulation and pronunciation of the Vedic phonemes (sounds). *Śikṣā* divides the letters into three classes: *svaras*, *vyañjanas* and *auṣmānas*. *Śikṣā* is essential, because *śruti* mantras are precise sound formulas that must be properly articulated if the desired result is to manifest. The letters differ from each other in their auditory qualities and meanings. This depends on the effort (*prayatna*), place of origin in the vocal faculties (*sthāna*), the force used (*śakti*), and the duration of time they are held (*kāla*).
2. *Vyākaraṇa* describes the grammar of Sanskrit and word formations. It specifies rules for how to create verbal forms (*dhātu-rupa*) from verbal roots (*dhātu*) and nominal forms (*nāma-rupa*) from nominal stems (*nāma*). Also, it gives rules on how to combine verbal forms and nominal forms into sentences (*vākya*).
3. *Chandas* describes the formation of sentences in metrical form. It is the science of poetic meter. In the *Vedas* there are eleven *chandas*, such as *gāyatrī*, *uṣṇik*, *anuṣṭup*, etc. (see *Bhāg.* 11.21.41). Unlike English, which uses a very limited number of meters (basically four), Sanskrit offers about two dozen Vedic meters and innumerable conventional meters.
4. *Nirukta* defines explanations, interpretations, and etymological derivations of Sanskrit words, via certain fundamental roots of words used in the *Vedas*.

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* begins by emphasizing the importance of the correct pronunciation of Vedic mantras. To a person learned in Sanskrit, the members of ISKCON must sound odd and uneducated when they chant *ślokas* and mantras in all kinds of whimsical ways.

2.3 The Sanskrit Alphabet (*Varṇa-mālā*)

The written form of Sanskrit, the script, is called Devanāgarī. The *Padma-Purāṇa* (*Pātāla-khaṇḍa*, chapter 100) mentions it by the name Devalipi. *Deva* means “demigod” and *lipi* means “script”: the script used by the demigods. *Nagara* means “city”, and *nāgarī* means “belonging to that city”; Devanāgarī is the script belonging to the city of the demigods.

Sarva-varṇāḥ, or *al* (there may be a connection between *al* and the Latin word *alpha*), is a term for the entire alphabet, which is commonly referred to as the Sanskrit *varṇa-mālā*. Each letter represents one sound and one sound only, which makes it easy to pronounce. There are different accents and dialects in different parts of India, but the original Sanskrit sounds are all pronounced the same.

The sound of Sanskrit mantras is based on four aspects:

sthāna: the pronunciation position in uttering the letter;

prayatna: the endeavor in enunciation;

kāla: the duration of the sound;

karaṇa: reflection, deflection, amplification, or echo of the sound.

Of the six *vedāṅgas*, the *śikṣā vedāṅga* describes how sound is produced by the body: The self (*ātmā*) initiates speech via the intelligence (*buddhi*), which inspires the mind (*manas*)

to ignite the somatic blaze within (*kāyāgni*) that generates air (*māruta*) to be exhaled, and it is oscillated (*mandra*) and vocalized in the mouth to emit sounds.

Each letter is made in a particular position of the mouth. This sound production requires a multitude of functions harmoniously working in the background, such as inhalation, contraction of the chest, exhalation (the lungs are the source of air required for speech), alteration of the shape of the vocal chords, the passage of air in the nasal chamber, the tongue motion, the teeth, and the lips.

Over and above the animals, humans are blessed with the special quality of spoken language, an essential element of culture. Primates cannot talk like humans because they possess only an elongated, level, and slim tongue, inflexible vocal chords, and less space in their mouth for movement.

“Although the tongue musculature of humans and chimpanzees is similar, the external shapes differ: the chimpanzee tongue is flat, whereas the human tongue is round. [...] the primary actions of the chimpanzee tongue are protrusion and retrusion, whereas the human tongue can be deformed in the oral cavity with a high degree of freedom.”

(Source: “Morphological analyses and 3D modeling of the tongue musculature of the chimpanzee — Pan troglodytes” in *American Journal of Primatology* by Hironori Takemoto, 2008)

In the Sanskrit alphabet, consisting of forty-eight letters, or *varṇas*, thirteen vowels are listed first, then the *anusvāra* and *visarga*, followed by thirty-three consonants. Altogether these constitute all the letters (*varṇas*) of the Sanskrit language. (There are some Vedic letters mentioned by Pāṇini not generally listed in the *varṇa-mālā* because they are not used in classical Sanskrit.) This ordering is different from the alphabets of Western languages. For example, the order of the English alphabet (a, b, c, d, e . . .) mixes vowels and consonants indiscriminately and is unsystematic.

The Sanskrit alphabet enumerates the sounds of Sanskrit in an ordered, patterned, and scientific manner. Artificial-intelligence researcher Rick Briggs of NASA suggested that Sanskrit grammar be studied to augment modern computer programming and artificial intelligence languages.

The alphabet is systematically arranged according to the structure of the mouth. The alphabet divides consonants into these categories:

- Hard/voiced (*kaṭhora*) and soft/unvoiced (*mṛdu*). Voiced sounds involve vibration of the vocal cords, and unvoiced sounds do not.
- Non-aspirated (*alpa-prāṇa*), in which the flow of air is restricted, and aspirated (*mahā-prāṇa*), in which the flow of air is emitted from the mouth while articulating the consonant.
- Heavy (*ghoṣa*) and light (*aghōṣa*).

It is essential to use the correct mouth positions for the letters and not merely approximate the sounds. If one knows the sounds of the individual letters, one can pronounce any Sanskrit word. With the help of this book, the Sanskrit practitioner can comprehend the systematic Sanskrit phonetics.

Each syllable, or *akṣara* (not to be confused with the *akṣara* mentioned above, meaning “indestructible sound”), is a vowel or a vowel prefixed or suffixed by a consonant or a cluster of two or more consonants. For example, the name Kṛṣṇa contains two syllables: *kṛṣ* + *ṇa* = [root sound *ṛ* prefixed by *k* and suffixed by *ṣ*] + [root sound *a* prefixed by *ṇ*].

Consonants (*varṇas*) joined with vowels (also *varṇas*) form syllables (*akṣaras*), which combine to form words (*śabdas*). Ordered words comprise a statement (*vākya*).

The pronunciation of Sanskrit is simple: You open the mouth wide and move the tongue and lips as necessary. The tongue and lips are almost pure muscle and have little or no resistance to movement. For those habituated to speaking different languages, in various accents and dialects, it may require some practice and attention to change to speak Sanskrit because of the increased tongue movement.

The basic difference between vowels and consonants is that vowels can be pronounced alone, because they are pronounced with the mouth open and unobstructed. Also, the pronunciation of a vowel can be prolonged whereas that of a consonant cannot. But consonants need to be pronounced with vowels because they involve various kinds of obstruction of the flow of air as it passes through the throat, mouth, and lips. We find this basic difference mentioned in the etymology of the English words *vowel* (from Latin *vocabile*: “pronounceable”) and *consonant* (*con-sonante*: “sounding together”).

The biggest factor in practicing the refined sounds of Sanskrit is to open the mouth. For English, the mouth opens to between .5 and 1 cm, whereas for Sanskrit the mouth should be open to between 2 and 2.5 cms. Try this for yourself: With the mouth only slightly open, pronounce a prolonged “a” and slowly open the mouth wide. As your mouth opens wide, listen to the change in quality, richness, and fullness. Can you hear the difference that a closed or open mouth makes?

In pronouncing vowels, the sound is produced with free-flowing air, which is unstopped, or not blocked at any point. With consonants, the sound is produced in a similar way, but by using the tongue or the lips to stop and release the air at the throat, the palate, the upper part of the palate (roof), the teeth, or the lips.

The first twenty-five consonants are called *sprṣṭa* or *sparṣa*: “with complete contact,” because they involve a complete stoppage of air.

The next four consonants (*ya, ra, la, va*) are called *īṣat-sprṣṭa* or *īṣat-sparṣa*, which means “with slight contact.” They are called palatal, cerebral, dental, and labial, respectively. Ancient Sanskrit scholars describe them as being sounded by an incomplete contact of the tongue with the place of articulation. The consonant *ya* is pronounced by the tongue’s very slight contact with the back of the mouth. They are considered to be between vowels and consonants, and so these semi-vowels in Sanskrit are called *antaḥstha* or *antaḥsparṣa*, which means “in between.”

The three sibilants *śa, ṣa, and sa*, are unvoiced hissing sounds, which in Sanskrit are known as *uṣman*, i.e., “heat producing” when uttered in the mouth. The last consonant in the Sanskrit alphabet is *ha*, the purely aspirated letter (hard aspirant), with the breath coming from the stomach area.

After the thirty-three consonants of the main alphabet, other conjunct consonants (such as *kṣa, jña, tra, ñja*, etc.) are counted as single letters that are not to be split or separated. For example, *kṣa* contains three *varṇas*, but is only one *akṣara*.

An enthusiastic student can memorize the Devanāgarī letters within three to seven days, but to become proficient in reading, practice is needed.



“It won’t take much time, but once you learn, in a few days, a few weeks, a few months, then for the rest of your life you’ll be a master, who will be able to pronounce Sanskrit correctly.”

2.4 Vowels (Svaras)

The Sanskrit term for “vowel” is *svara* (“ac” is another term used by Pāṇini). Patanjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* says *svayam rājate iti svarah*: “A *svara* is a self-existent or independent sound.” The fourteen *svaras*, or vowels, of the Sanskrit alphabet as listed by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī:

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	r	ṛ	l	ḷ	e	ai	o	au

In some references, only thirteen vowels are listed, because the rarely used long vowel ḷ is dropped and not counted.

2.4.1 Simple and Combined Vowels

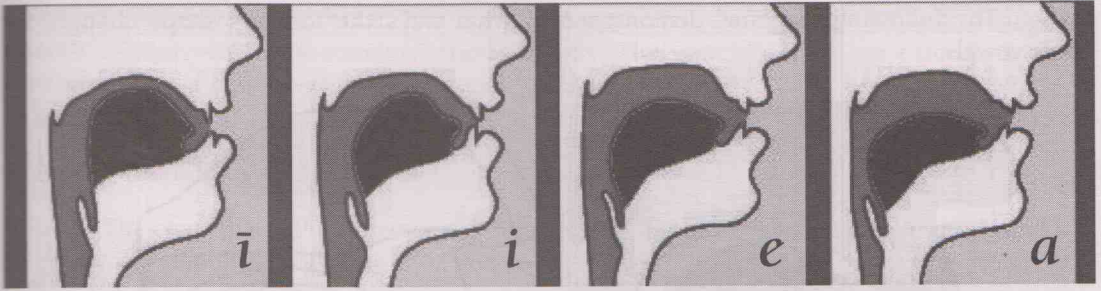
Vowels are in two groups: simple and combined. Combined vowels are created by combining simple vowels. The simple vowels are listed in five pairs: *a* and *ā*, *i* and *ī*, *u* and *ū*, *r* and *ṛ*, and *l* and *ḷ*. In each pair, the first is short, and the second is another version of the same, held exactly twice as long. The short vowel should be pronounced for a length of one beat, and the long vowel for two beats.

Short vowels		Long vowels	
अ	a	आ	ā (aa)
इ	i	ई	ī (ee)
उ	u	ऊ	ū (oo)
ऋ	r	ॠ	ṛ
ऌ	l	ॡ	ḷ

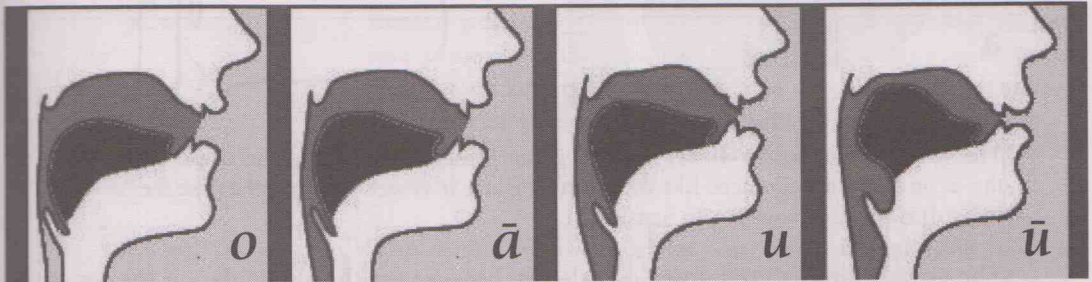
The last four vowels shown here are transliterated with English consonants because there are no separate letters available for them in the English alphabet. But be aware that these are vowels, not consonants. The proper pronunciation of the vowels *r*, *ṛ*, *l* and *ḷ* appears to have largely disappeared long ago from the Sanskrit vernacular, and therefore information about their exact enunciation is lost. These vowels remained only in print, and readers inaccurately pronounced them. The original “Kṛṣṇa” was (and to this day is) mispronounced as Krishna or Krushna, as we shall see in coming chapters.

The four *saṃyukta*, or combined vowels, are *e*, *ai*, *o*, and *au*. The combined vowels are created by combining *a* with a vowel following it: *a* plus *i* makes *e*; *a* plus *e* makes *ai*; *a* plus *u* makes *o*; and *a* plus *o* makes *au*.

Combined Vowels	
ए e (a + i)	ऐ ai (a + e)
ओ o (a + u)	औ au (a + o)



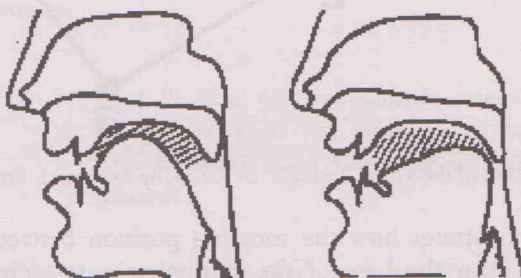
The figures above illustrate the pronunciation of vowels requiring the tongue to move up toward the roof of the mouth.



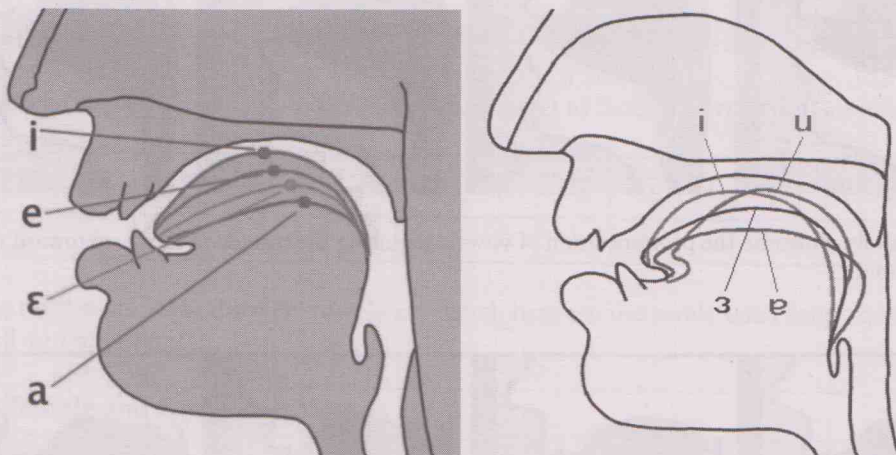
Source: Encyclopedia Britannica (1994)

The figures above illustrate the pronunciation of vowels requiring the tongue to move back toward the soft palate.

The above diagrams depict the tongue's position (represented in black) in the mouth (gray) for pronouncing the short vowels *i*, *a*, and *u* and the long vowels *ī*, *ā*, *ū*, *e*, and *o*. The tongue is in a neutral position for the vowel *a*, but for the vowels *e* and *i*, it is raised toward the roof, and for the vowels *u* and *o*, it is raised backward toward the soft palate. The vowel *e* is generally uttered for a short duration in English, whereas in Sanskrit it is used only as a long vowel. The same applies to the vowel *o*. They are both held for two beats. The remaining long vowels, *ai* and *au*, are pronounced by moving the tongue from one position to the next. The vowel *ai* is pronounced by moving the tongue upward from the *a* position to the *i* position. The vowel *au* is pronounced by moving the tongue backward from the *a* position to the *u* position, while the lips protrude outward and the hole or space between the two lips shrinks.

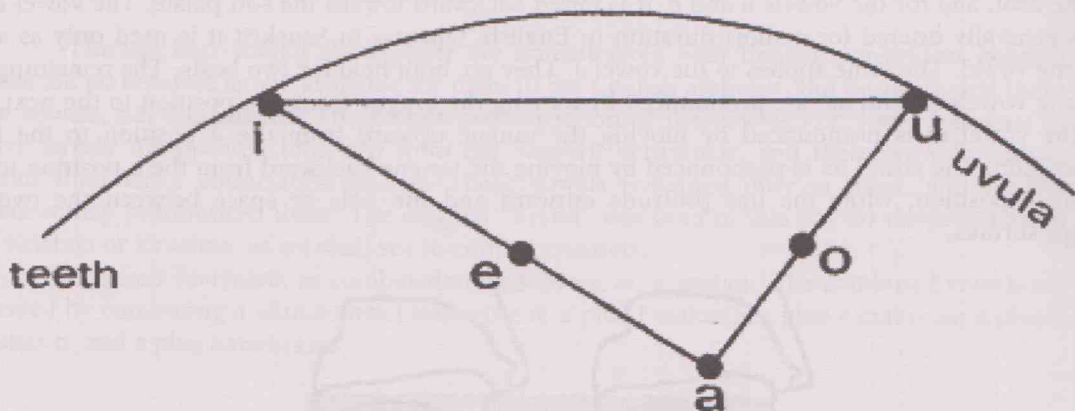


The following diagrams demonstrate in what ways the tongue's shape changes for some vowels.



The vowel ϵ (like the 'ea' vowel in *head*) is not present in Sanskrit. The vowel 3 (like the 'u' in *but*) is pronounced like the short Sanskrit 'a' vowel. The vowel ϑ (like the 'a' in *hard*) is the long vowel 'ā' in Sanskrit.

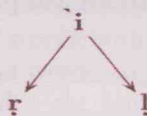
The vowels *i* and *e* are known as palatals, because for their articulation the tongue is raised forward toward the front of the palate, or the roof of the mouth. The vowels *o* and *u* are known as velars, because for their articulation the tongue is drawn back toward the velum, or soft palate. The tongue remains in a neutral position for the articulation of the vowel *a*, which is thus termed a *neutral* vowel. (Even if the tongue is restricted or cut, one can still pronounce the vowel *a* and the guttural consonants.) The vowels are further classified as *open* or *closed*, depending upon the distance between the tongue and the palate.



Source: "A Pedagogical Application of the Vowel Triangle" in *Italica*, by Kenneth J. Koubek, 1973.

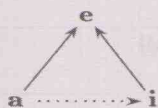
This diagram demonstrates how the tongue's position between the teeth and uvula (the fleshy lobe hanging from the base of the soft palate) must change to utter different vowels. Uttering the vowel *a* does not require any movement of the tongue; it just remains neutral. To pronounce *i* and *e*, the tongue must rise toward the teeth, and for *o* and *u* it must

rise backward toward the throat. Not only the tongue, but the lips must move to change the mouth's shape when pronouncing various vowels. The vowels *r* and *l* are extensions of the base vowel *i*:



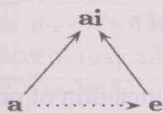
The chart that follows demonstrates the combinations of the basic vowels *a*, *i*, and *u* to create the combined vowels *e*, *ai*, *o*, and *au*.

Further vowels are derived by combining the **a** sound with **i** and **u** to form the four compound vowels (**sandhyakṣara**).



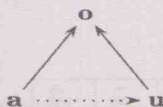
The **e** sound arises when **a** is sounded through the **i** mouth position. Remember that **a** has a relaxed throat and tongue, while **i** has the back of the tongue raised and the throat tense: so relaxing the throat while retaining the back of the tongue raised will produce **e**.

The vowel **e** sounds similar to that in 'fair' or 'eight'.



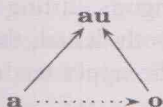
The **ai** sound arises when **e** is further combined with **a** as it were. Now the only difference between **e** and **a** is the raised back of the tongue, so to move from **e** towards the **a** sound, we need to drop the back of the tongue to a position half way between that used for **i** and **e** and the relaxed position used for **a**.

The **ai** sounds similar to the vowel in 'aisle' or 'pie'; there should be no glide or slide in the sound from **a** to **i**.



In a manner similar to the arising of **e**, when **a** is sounded through the **u** mouth position, i.e. with the lips in the position for **u** but the throat relaxed for sounding **a**, the sound **o** naturally arises.

The vowel **o** should sound between 'awe' and 'owe' (or between the vowel sounds in 'corn' and 'cone'); the ideal is that point where the sound could be taken as either of the two English sounds.



And finally, the **au** sound arises when **a** is combined with **o**, so that the position of the lips is roughly half way between that used for **u** and **a**, and the throat is relaxed.

The **au** sounds similar to the vowel in 'down' or 'hound' but without the glide from **a** to **u**.

2.4.2 Vowel Pronunciation

The table that follows describes the actions and placements of the throat, tongue, and lips in pronouncing vowels.

Vowel	Throat	Tongue	Lips	as in
<i>a</i>	tense	relaxed	wide open	yoga, ultra, America
<i>ā</i>	relaxed	relaxed	wide open	father, start
<i>i</i>	tense	back raised*	wide open	pink, hit
<i>ī</i>	tense	back raised	wide open	need, heat
<i>e</i>	relaxed	back raised	wide open	they
<i>ai</i>	relaxed	half raised back	wide open	aisle
<i>u</i>	tense	relaxed	small circle	bull, put
<i>ū</i>	tense	relaxed	small circle	fool, moon, school
<i>o</i>	relaxed	relaxed	small circle	foam
<i>au</i>	relaxed	relaxed	large circle	hour, authority, awesome
<i>r</i> **	tense	half raised back & tip vertical	wide open	American pronunciation of pretty – prrrty (short roll of tongue)
<i>ṛ</i>	tense	half raised back & tip vertical	wide open	longer version of <i>r</i>
<i>l</i> ***	tense	half raised back & tip vertical	wide open	American pronunciation of pretty, but with <i>l</i> ' and short roll of tongue

Notes:

*The back of the tongue is raised.

**For *r*, the tongue should be in the *mūrdhanya* (cerebral) position.

***For *l*, it should be in the *tālavya* (palatal) position.

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ
<i>a</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>ṛ</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>l'</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>au</i>

In the table above, the first ten vowels are simple vowels, and the last four are combined vowels (also called diphthongs). The first two diphthongs, *e* and *ai*, are both gutturo-palatals. The last two diphthongs, *o* and *au*, are both gutturo-labials.

The *r* and *ṛ* are both cerebral, that is, they are produced by the tongue's curling back upwards and making contact with the roof of the mouth. The *l* and *l'* are both dental, that is, they are produced by the tongue's tip pressing flatly against the back of the upper teeth and gums.

Svaras (vowels) are in three categories:

1. The five *hrasva* (short) *svaras*, with a timing of one syllabic instant, or *mātrā*, are: *a*, *i*, *u*, *r*, and *l*. These are short simple vowels.

2. The nine *dirgha* (long) *svaras*, with a timing of two *mātrās*, are: the long simple vowels *ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ṛ*, and *ḷ* and the combined vowels *e*, *ai*, *o*, and *au* (diphthongs are not topped with a line).
3. The nine *pluta* (protracted) *svaras*, with a timing of three *mātrās*, are simply triplets of the long, or *dirgha* *svaras*, and are used when calling out for someone: *āāā*, *īīī*, *ūūū*, *ṛṛṛ*, *ḷḷḷ*, *eee*, *aaa-iii*, *ooo*, and *aaa-uuu*.

In Vedic Sanskrit, the language of the *śruti*, vowels are distinguished according to three pitch accents. Vedic Sanskrit is not spoken as a language; it is sung as recitations. These vowel pitch accents are like the musical notations for reciting the song of the *Veda*. Following Pāṇini's rules, in the formation of a word from its rudimentary elements, the vowels acquire one of three basic pitch accents, or *svaras*:

- (a) *udātta*, raised pitch;
- (b) *anudātta*, not raised;
- (c) *svarita*, a blend of the first two.

The pronunciation of the *svarita* is initially *udātta*, for the period of half a short vowel and *anudātta* for the rest (i.e., one-and-a-half measures for a long vowel). In continuous speech, or *saṃhitā*, all *anudātta* syllables following a *svarita* are called *pracaya* and are pronounced *ekaśruti* (monotone, between *anudātta* and *udātta*). However, the *anudātta* immediately preceding a *svarita* or *udātta* is pronounced *sannatara* (lower than *anudātta*). The *Vedas* may also be recited entirely in *ekaśruti* (with exceptions). Nonetheless, be aware that the accent may affect the meaning of a word, particularly a compound (e.g., *sū-kṛta*, ind. "well done"; *su-kṛtā*, n. "a good deed"). With rare exceptions, a word standing alone has at most one vowel accented *udātta* or *svarita*, the rest being *anudātta*. This is the basis of the Western system of marking Vedic accents in transliteration. Since most vowels are *anudātta*, this is taken as the basic or unaccented form, and the other accents are marked as follows:

- (a) acute (´) for the *udātta* (e.g., *kárma*).
- (b) grave (`) for the *svarita* (e.g., *vākyà*).

2.5 Consonants (Vyañjanas)

The Sanskrit term for consonant is *vyañjana*. Defining this, Patanjali says *anu vyajyate iti vyañjanaḥ*, which implies that a consonant is a sound that cannot be pronounced without a vowel. The letter "a" is inherent in every consonant. In the Devanāgarī script, however, the inherent "a" is not expressed in a consonant, even when a consonant is in a medial or final position in a word.

With the first twenty-five consonants, the sound is produced by using the tongue or the lips to stop and release the air at the throat, the palate, the roof of the mouth, the teeth, or the lips. So sometimes these twenty-five consonants are called "stops".

This table shows the thirty-three *vyañjanas*, or consonants:

Stops	क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṅa
	च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña
	ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa
	त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na
	प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma
Semivowels		य ya	र ra	ल la	व va
Aspirates		श śa	ष ṣa	स sa	ह ha

There are three sections:

1. The twenty-five *sparśas*, or stops, beginning with *ka* and ending with *ma*, in five rows, or *vargas*: *ka-varga*, *ca-varga*, *ṭa-varga*, *ta-varga*, and *pa-varga*.
2. The four *antasthaḥ*, or semi-vowels: *ya*, *ra*, *la*, and *va*.
3. The four *ūṣmas*, or heat-generating aspirates: three sibilants (*śa*, *ṣa*, *sa*) and *ha*.

Some Indic languages that use Devanāgarī script include *kṣa* (क्ष) and *jña* (ज्ञ) in the *varṇa-mālā* or alphabet, which increases the total count of *vyañjanas* or consonants. For example, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī counts *kṣa* as the thirty-fourth consonant. But other languages with Devanāgarī script treat them as separate because these conjunct consonants are combinations of two or more *vyañjanas* (as explained in section 2.5.7). Śrīla Prabhupāda gives an interesting explanation of the Lord's name *Adhokṣaja*, which supports the inclusion of *kṣa*:

And in Sanskrit – as in English, it is A to Z – similarly, in Sanskrit, *a*, *ā*, *i*, *u*, and the end is *kṣa*. So “*a*” and “*kṣa*”, that is called *akṣa*. *Akṣa-ja*. And *ja* means generated. So we also compose words. Those who are Sanskrit scholars compose words from *a* to *kṣa*, just as in English they compose words from A to Z. So our mental speculation and advancement of education is limited between this *a* and *kṣa*, *akṣa*. *Akṣa-ja*. But Kṛṣṇa is *adhokṣaja*. *Adhokṣaja* means where these kinds of speculations, beginning from *a* to *kṣa*, will not act. Therefore His name is *Adhokṣaja*.

In the *Vedas*, another consonant is found: ṣ , which has the following equivalent roman transliteration: *ṣ*. A commonly spoken phrase in Vedic sacrifices contains this consonant: *agnimīṣe purohitam*. When this Vedic consonant is included, the list of consonants comes to thirty-four.

2.5.1 Aspiration

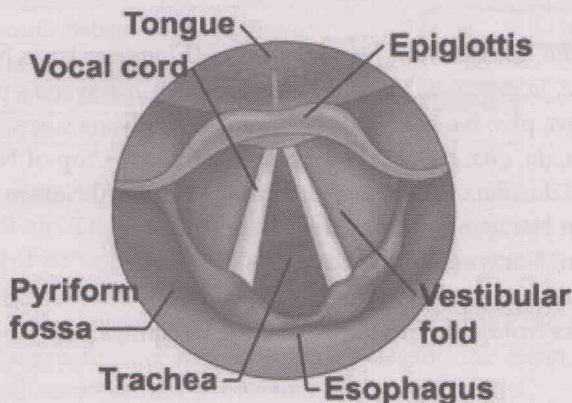
Among the *sparsas*, or the five rows of consonants called stops, the first and third consonants of each *varga*, or row, are termed “unaspirated” because they require less aspiration. The second and fourth consonants are termed “aspirated” because they require more aspiration. “Less” and “more” are sometimes termed “low” and “high” aspiration. The difference between them is the amount of air exhaled from the throat after the initial sound. An “aspirated” consonant is pronounced with a strong breath of air (*mahā-prāṇa*) after the consonant, while an “unaspirated” consonant is pronounced with much less exhalation (*alpa-prāṇa*). The test for high aspiration is to put your hand in front of your mouth. You feel a puff of air when you say an aspirated consonant.

Furthermore, consonants can be either voiced or unvoiced. Voiced consonants are produced by vibrating the vocal cords, and unvoiced consonants do not require use of the vocal cords. The test for voiced consonants is to put your index finger on your Adam’s apple. You feel the vocal cords vibrate when you say a voiced consonant.

English unvoiced consonants (e.g., pen, ten, men) are aspirated when they start with a syllable that is emphasized. They are unaspirated (e.g., stun, spun, skin) when immediately following the sibilant consonant “s”. Basically there is an alternation between aspirated and unaspirated consonants. “Pin” has an aspirated p because the p is in the initial position and thus stressed. But “lip” has an unaspirated p because the p is in the final position and unstressed.

In English there are variants of the same phoneme, and so speakers are unconscious of the differences. Therefore it is more difficult for English speakers to correctly pronounce the soft-dental, unaspirated consonants.

One of the most effective ways to be sure of correctly pronouncing both the aspirated and unaspirated consonants is to hold a piece of paper in front of your mouth as you say them. When an aspirated consonant is spoken, the paper will slightly shake. The paper will remain steady when an unaspirated consonant is said. It is important to know the difference while pronouncing, and also to know the difference while hearing.



In this chart, the vertical columns contain aspirated and unaspirated consonants.

	alpa-prāṇa unaspirated & unvoiced	mahā-prāṇa aspirated & unvoiced	alpa-prāṇa unaspirated & voiced	mahā-prāṇa aspirated & voiced	anunāsika nasal
Gutturals	क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṇa
Palatals	च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña
Cerebrals	ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa
Dentals	त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na
Labials	प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma

2.5.2 Points of Articulation

The pronunciation position for each letter is given in Jīva Gosvāmī's elaboration (*vṛtti*) on the *Harināmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa*'s first *sūtra*:

a-ā-ka-varga-ha-visargāṇām kaṇṭhaḥ.
i-ī-ca-varga-ya-śānām tālu.
u-ū-pa-vargāṇām oṣṭhaḥ.
ṛ-ṛ-ṭa-varga-ra-śānām mūrdhā.
ḷ-ḷ-ta-varga-la-śānām dantāḥ.
e-ai-toḥ kaṇṭha-tālu.
o-au-toḥ kaṇṭha-uṣṭham.
va-kārasya danta-uṣṭham.
anusvārasya śīro nāsikā vā ity-ādīni.

- a, ā, ka-varga (ka, kha, ga, gha, ṇa), ha, and visarga (h) appear from Nārāyaṇa's throat;
- i, ī, ca-varga (ca, cha, ja, jha, ña), ya, and śa appear from Nārāyaṇa's palate;
- u, ū, and pa-varga (pa, pha, ba, bha, ma) appear from Nārāyaṇa's lips;
- ṛ, ṛ, ṭa-varga (ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa), ra, and ṣa appear from the top of Nārāyaṇa's palate;
- ḷ, ḷ, ta-varga (ta, tha, da, dha, na), la, and sa appear from Lord Nārāyaṇa's teeth;
- e and ai appear from Nārāyaṇa's throat and palate;
- o and au appear from Nārāyaṇa's throat and lips;
- v appears from Nārāyaṇa's teeth and lips;
- anusvāra (ṁ) appears from either the head or nose of Nārāyaṇa.

Because the *varṇas* appeared from Nārāyaṇa in these specific places, these are the proper places to pronounce the *varṇas*; otherwise, we end up pronouncing them wrong. The *varṇas* *a*, *ā*, *ka-varga* (*ka*, *kha*, *ga*, *gha*, *ṇa*), *ha*, and *visarga* (*ḥ*) are called *kaṇṭhya* because their place of pronunciation is the throat (*kaṇṭha*). The *varṇas* *i*, *ī*, *ca-varga* (*ca*, *cha*, *ja*, *jha*, *ṇa*), *ya*, and *śa* are called *tālavya* because their place of pronunciation is the palate (*tālu*). Other names, also given according to the place of pronunciation, are shown below along with their English equivalents.

	Vowels (svaras)			Consonants (vyaṇjanas)						
				<i>alpa prāṇa</i>	<i>mahā prāṇa</i>	<i>alpa prāṇa</i>	<i>mahā prāṇa</i>	<i>nāsikā</i>		
<i>kaṇṭhya</i> guttural	अ <i>a</i>	आ <i>ā</i>	ओ ओ <i>o au</i>	क <i>ka</i>	ख <i>kha</i>	ग <i>ga</i>	घ <i>gha</i>	ङ <i>ṇa</i>	ह <i>ha</i>	: <i>ḥ</i>
<i>tālavya</i> palatal	इ <i>i</i>	ई <i>ī</i>	ए ए <i>e ai</i>	च <i>ca</i>	छ <i>cha</i>	ज <i>ja</i>	झ <i>jha</i>	ञ <i>ṇa</i>	य <i>ya</i>	श <i>śa</i>
<i>mūrdhanya</i> cerebral*	ऋ <i>r</i>	ॠ <i>ṛ</i>		ट <i>ṭa</i>	ठ <i>ṭha</i>	ड <i>ḍa</i>	ढ <i>ḍha</i>	ण <i>ṇa</i>	र <i>ra</i>	ष <i>ṣa</i>
<i>dantya</i> dental	ल <i>l</i>	लृ <i>l'</i>		त <i>ta</i>	थ <i>tha</i>	द <i>da</i>	ध <i>dha</i>	न <i>na</i>	ल <i>la</i>	स <i>sa</i>
<i>oṣṭhya</i> labial	उ <i>u</i>	ऊ <i>ū</i>	ओ ओ <i>o au</i>	प <i>pa</i>	फ <i>pha</i>	ब <i>ba</i>	भ <i>bha</i>	म <i>ma</i>	व <i>va</i>	

**Mūrdhanya*, or cerebral, is also called retroflex.

Notes: Both *e* and *ai* are *kaṇṭhya-tālavya*, *o* and *au* are *kaṇṭhaṣṭhya*, and *va* is *dantaṣṭhya*.

Just to repeat, some letters fall into two categories, as listed both above and below:

Gutturo-palatal (<i>kaṇṭha-tālavya</i>)	<i>e</i>	<i>ai</i>
Gutturo-labial (<i>kaṇṭhaṣṭhya</i>)	<i>o</i>	<i>au</i>
Dento-labial (<i>dantaṣṭhya</i>)	<i>va</i>	
Either in the head or in the nose (<i>śiro nāsikā vā</i>)	<i>m</i>	

Among consonants, the full-contact consonants come first. They involve obstructing or stopping the flow of air. These twenty-five are listed in five groups of five, depending upon where the obstruction of air occurs. In each of the five groups there are five sounds.

The word *sparsa* (meaning “touch”) is used for the first twenty-five *vyaṇjanas* (consonants) because articulating them requires some part of the mouth to *touch* some other part of the mouth. The practitioner should initially identify the exact part of the mouth that the tongue should touch to accurately pronounce each consonant.

The commentaries on Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* say that the throat, the palate, the roof of the mouth, the teeth, the lips, and the nose are the six points of articulation. When the tongue contacts these six points of articulation, the consonants or vowels so sounded are called guttural (the throat), palatal (the roof of the mouth, or palate), cerebral (the hard part of the palate), dental (the tongue pressed behind the upper teeth along the gum), labial (lips), and nasal (nose).

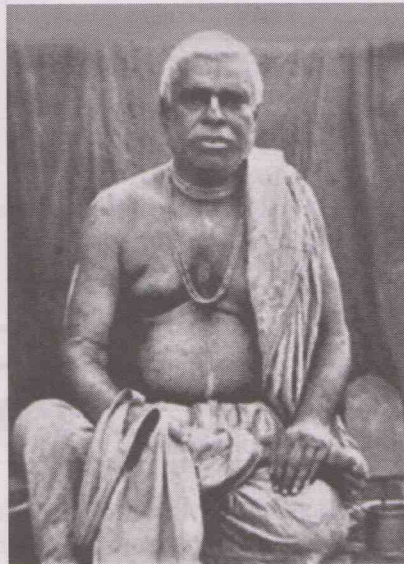
In pronouncing vowels, a sound is produced with air by these different organs and the tongue, and the air is not stopped or blocked at any point. With consonants, the sound is produced in a similar way, but the tongue or the lips make full contact, stopping and releasing the air.

If you have a cold, then you cannot accurately pronounce Sanskrit, because there are a lot of nasal sounds. Your nose has to be clear. And you also have to have all your teeth. It is difficult to understand the speech of young children whose teeth are not grown out, and of old people without teeth. To pronounce the language you need all these parts in good operating condition. The Sanskrit language requires that you really open up all your organs and fully make the sound with the movement of the tongue, which has a big role to play. Some people sound like sparrows: just "cheep-cheep-cheep". There is no *vadane bhoṛi*, or "mouthful".

*mukunda mādḥava yādava hari,
bolena bolo re vadana bhoṛi'*

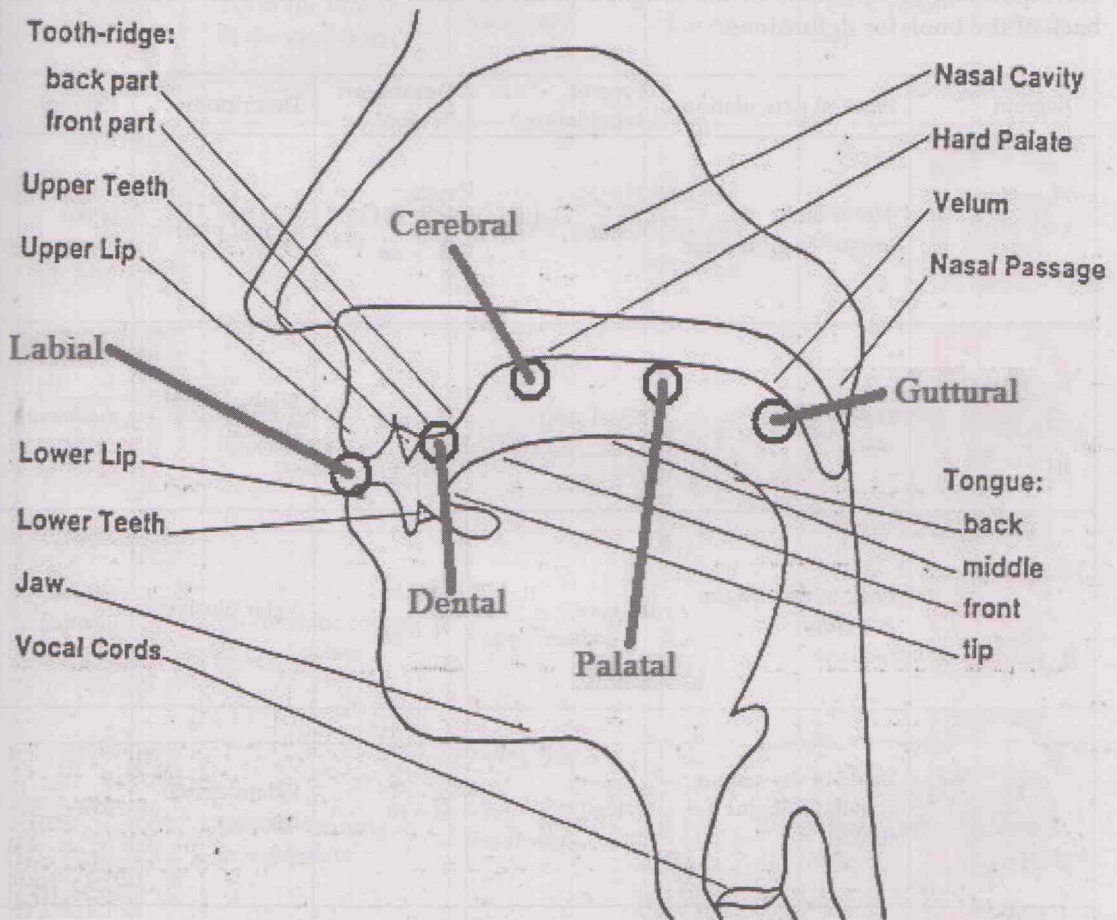
"Now just fill your mouths with the holy names; Mukunda! Mādḥava! Yādava! Hari!"

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Arunodaya-kīrtana*

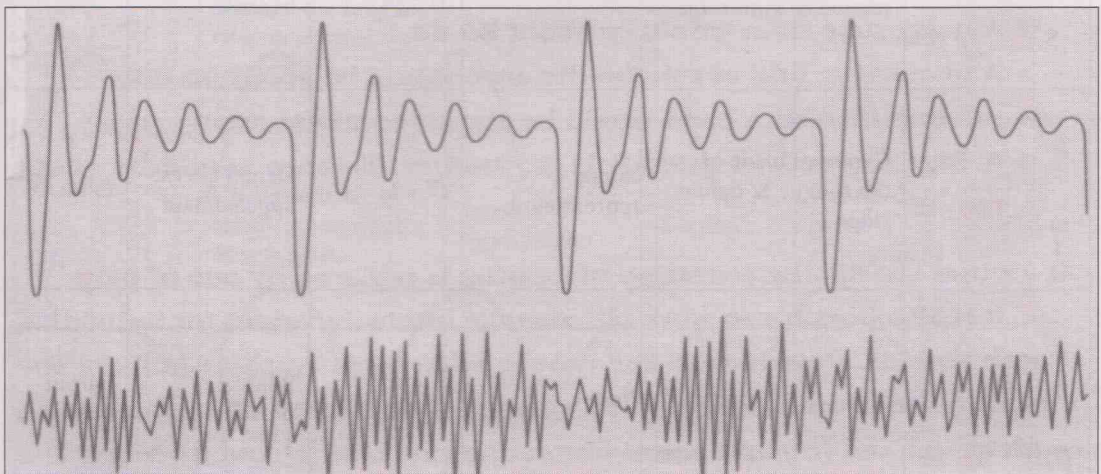


Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says that when you are singing the Lord's glories, it should be with a full heart, clear throat, and wide-open mouth. Some people hardly open their lips or mouth while speaking. So naturally their pronunciation is a kind of hissing, approximately the same but incorrect.








Relevant to Sanskrit are five main places of articulation, or obstruction of the breath or air, and the corresponding types of sounds, shown in this figure.



This diagram depicts the waveforms of a vowel (*top*) and a consonant (*bottom*):

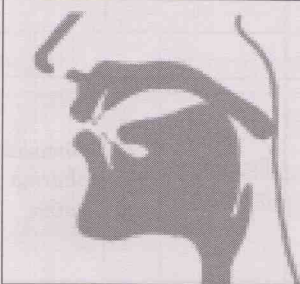
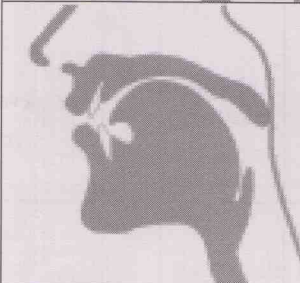
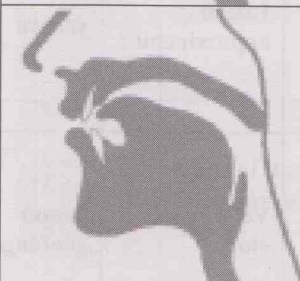
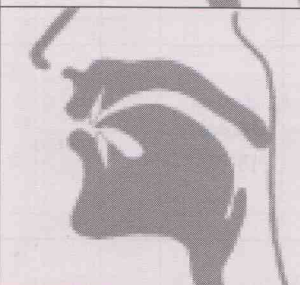
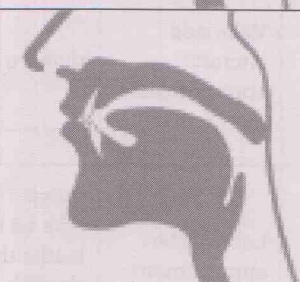


Pronunciation requires special movements of the tongue and lips. The diagrams that follow delineate the place and manner of articulation for various consonants and vowels, corresponding to variations in the tongue's position. Refer to the **Phonetic Glossary** at the back of the book for definitions.

Diagram	Place of Articulation	Type of Articulation	Devanagari Symbol	Description	Example
	Tip or blade of tongue & gum ridge	Plosive	ट = <i>ṭa</i> ड = <i>ḍa</i>	Dental plosive	<i>ṭanka</i> <i>ḍamaru</i>
	Lips	Nasal stop	म = <i>ma</i>	Bilabial nasal stop	<i>mādhava</i>
	Back of the tongue & velum	Plosive	क = <i>ka</i> ग = <i>ga</i>	Velar plosive	<i>keśava</i> <i>govinda</i>
	Blade of the tongue & palato-dental region	Fricative	श = <i>śa</i>	Palato-dental fricative	<i>śiva</i>
	Tip or blade of the tongue & gum ridge	Fricative	स = <i>sa</i>	Dental fricative	<i>sudāmā</i>
	Centre of blade of the tongue & dental ridge	Lateral approximant	ल = <i>la</i>	Dental lateral approximant	<i>lalitā</i>
	Lips	Plosive	प = <i>pa</i> ब = <i>ba</i>	Bilabial plosive	<i>pārtha</i> <i>balārāma</i>

	Tip of the tongue & the gum ridge	Nasal stop	न = na	Dental nasal stop	nārada
	Tip of the tongue & upper teeth	Fricative	द = da ध = dha थ = tha	Dental fricative	dāmodara dharma nātha
	Lower lip & upper teeth	Fricative	व = va	Labio-dental fricative	vāsudeva
	Front of the tongue & hard palate	Approximant	य = ya	Palatal approximant	yādava
	Back of the tongue & soft palate	Nasal stop	म = m ण = ṇ	Velar nasal stop	haṁsa gaurāṅga
	Blade of the tongue & gum ridge	Approximant	र = ra	Dental approximant	rāma
	Center or blade of tongue, gum ridge, & soft palate	Lateral approximant	ṛ = ṛha	Velarized lateral approximant	ṛhākura
	Lips, back of tongue, & soft palate	Approximant	वा = wa (special case of va)	Labio-velar approximant	svāmī (the vā here is like the English wa in water)

This diagram shows the places of articulation corresponding to the five types of consonants.

Diagram	Place of Articulation	Consonants										
	<i>Kanṭhya</i> (guttural): Sounds made by a constriction between the back of the tongue and the velum.	<table><tr><td><i>ka</i></td><td>क</td></tr><tr><td><i>kha</i></td><td>ख</td></tr><tr><td><i>ga</i></td><td>ग</td></tr><tr><td><i>gha</i></td><td>घ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ṅa</i></td><td>ङ</td></tr></table>	<i>ka</i>	क	<i>kha</i>	ख	<i>ga</i>	ग	<i>gha</i>	घ	<i>ṅa</i>	ङ
<i>ka</i>	क											
<i>kha</i>	ख											
<i>ga</i>	ग											
<i>gha</i>	घ											
<i>ṅa</i>	ङ											
	<i>Tālavya</i> (palatal): Sounds made by a constriction between the front of the tongue and the highest part of the roof of the mouth.	<table><tr><td><i>ca</i></td><td>च</td></tr><tr><td><i>cha</i></td><td>छ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ja</i></td><td>ज</td></tr><tr><td><i>jha</i></td><td>झ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ña</i></td><td>ञ</td></tr></table>	<i>ca</i>	च	<i>cha</i>	छ	<i>ja</i>	ज	<i>jha</i>	झ	<i>ña</i>	ञ
<i>ca</i>	च											
<i>cha</i>	छ											
<i>ja</i>	ज											
<i>jha</i>	झ											
<i>ña</i>	ञ											
	<i>Mūrdhanya</i> (cerebral): Sounds made by a constriction between the blade of the tongue and the cerebral, just behind the gum ridge, where the roof of the mouth sharply rises.	<table><tr><td><i>ṭa</i></td><td>ट</td></tr><tr><td><i>ṭha</i></td><td>ठ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ḍa</i></td><td>ड</td></tr><tr><td><i>ḍha</i></td><td>ढ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ṇa</i></td><td>ण</td></tr></table>	<i>ṭa</i>	ट	<i>ṭha</i>	ठ	<i>ḍa</i>	ड	<i>ḍha</i>	ढ	<i>ṇa</i>	ण
<i>ṭa</i>	ट											
<i>ṭha</i>	ठ											
<i>ḍa</i>	ड											
<i>ḍha</i>	ढ											
<i>ṇa</i>	ण											
	<i>Dantya</i> (dental): Sounds made by a constriction between the tip of the tongue and the upper teeth.	<table><tr><td><i>ta</i></td><td>त</td></tr><tr><td><i>tha</i></td><td>थ</td></tr><tr><td><i>da</i></td><td>द</td></tr><tr><td><i>dha</i></td><td>ध</td></tr><tr><td><i>na</i></td><td>न</td></tr></table>	<i>ta</i>	त	<i>tha</i>	थ	<i>da</i>	द	<i>dha</i>	ध	<i>na</i>	न
<i>ta</i>	त											
<i>tha</i>	थ											
<i>da</i>	द											
<i>dha</i>	ध											
<i>na</i>	न											
	<i>Oṣṭhya</i> (labial): Sounds in which the airflow is modified by constricting the lower lip and the upper lip.	<table><tr><td><i>pa</i></td><td>प</td></tr><tr><td><i>pha</i></td><td>फ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ba</i></td><td>ब</td></tr><tr><td><i>bha</i></td><td>भ</td></tr><tr><td><i>ma</i></td><td>म</td></tr></table>	<i>pa</i>	प	<i>pha</i>	फ	<i>ba</i>	ब	<i>bha</i>	भ	<i>ma</i>	म
<i>pa</i>	प											
<i>pha</i>	फ											
<i>ba</i>	ब											
<i>bha</i>	भ											
<i>ma</i>	म											

There are five points of articulation:

1. The throat, or more exactly, the back of the mouth at the top of the throat. The breath becomes blocked by the very back of the tongue to produce the guttural sounds.

क	ख	ग	घ	ङ
<i>ka</i>	<i>kha</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>gha</i>	<i>ṅa</i>
as in cut	as in bunk-house, or as the American pronunciation of "c" in cardboard	as in gullible	as in log-house, or the "gh" in ghost	as in stung or sing

The above syllables are uttered from the throat. The consonant *kha* is just a more heavily aspirated *ka* (i.e., it is spoken with more breath), and the *gha* is a more heavily aspirated *ga*. The letters are written as *kha* and *gha*, but the ending "*ha*" is not to be sounded. Rather, the "*ha*" indicates only that more air needs to be released while the letter is spoken. However, when pronouncing the actual consonant *ha* (ह), "*ha*" is to be sounded. While *ka* and *kha* are voiceless, *ga* and *gha* are voiced consonants (they are sounded with a vocal-cord vibration). *ṅa* is a nasal consonant, sounded gutturally in the nose.

2. The palate, which is at the front of the top of the mouth, a little back from the teeth. Contact with the palate is made by the tongue, not exactly by the tip but by the middle of the tongue behind the tip. To pronounce the palatals, put the tongue in the position to pronounce "i". In this position, practice the other letters of this group. For the letters *ca* to *ṇa*, the tongue makes full contact with the palate. The palatals are to be pronounced as fricatives, the breath being stopped by the middle of the tongue behind its tip.

च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
<i>ca</i>	<i>cha</i>	<i>ja</i>	<i>jha</i>	<i>ṇa</i>
as in chuckle	as in church	as in just	as in hedgehog	as in canyon

3. The roof of the mouth (called *murdhni*) is further back from the palate, around the middle of the top of the mouth. It is shaped like an upside-down rounded cup. The tip of the tongue should bend or curl backward and upward a bit to properly contact the roof. Many Westerners are unable to pronounce the cerebral or retroflex consonants because Western languages do not usually require flexing the tongue backward to strike the roof of the mouth. Therefore, all Western devotees must endeavor to ensure that they can pronounce the cerebrals, which are essential for accurate pronunciation of Sanskrit. The cerebrals are produced at the center of the roof of the mouth, the breath being stopped by the front of the tongue curled upwards.

ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण
ta	tha	da	dha	na
as in talk or try (note the tongue position)	as in anthill	as in dawn (note the tongue position)	red-hot	does not exist in English, so pronounce <i>nut</i> with the tongue curled up against the roof of the mouth

4. The teeth. The Sanskrit dental sounds should be pronounced with the tip of the tongue pressed flat against the back of the upper teeth and gums. When English speakers use their native so-called dentals, Indians usually hear those as cerebrals. English “dental” sounds, pronounced further back, hardly touch the upper teeth at all. This is a major cause of a Westerner’s Sanskrit pronunciation sounding wrong to Indians. The Sanskrit dentals are produced at the upper teeth, the breath being stopped by the tip of the tongue.

त	थ	द	ध	न
ta	tha	da	dha	na
as in thorough without the aspirated “h”	as in thirst	as the “th” in the	as the “th” in rhythm	as in nurture

5. The lips. As in English, labial sounds are produced by closing and opening the lips and forcing the air between them. The labials are produced at the upper lip, the breath being stopped by the lower lip.

प	फ	ब	भ	म
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma
as in puff	as in loophole, uphill (not an “f”)	as in bus	as rubharb	as in must

The preceding five consonants, known as *pa-varga*, sequentially symbolize human life in this world:

- *pa* stands for *pariśrama*, which means “strenuous labor.”
- *pha* stands for *phena*, which means “foam emitted from the mouth in fatigue.”
- *ba* stands for *bandhana*, which means “bondage of ensuing fruitive reactions due for all one’s performances of pious and impious *karma*.”
- *bha* stands for *bhaya*, which means “anxiety and fright.”
- *ma* stands for *mṛtyu*, meaning “demise or death.”
- How a devotee of the Lord can achieve freedom from the cycle of birth and death is prescribed by Arjuna as he prays to the Lord:

अर्जुन उवाच
कृष्ण कृष्ण महाबाहो भक्तानामभयङ्कर ।
त्वमेको दह्यमानानामपवर्गोऽसि संसृतेः ॥ २२ ॥

arjuna uvāca
kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mahā-bāho
bhaktānām abhayaṅkara
tvam eko dahyamānānām
apavargo 'si saṁsṛteḥ



Arjuna said: “O my Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, You are the almighty Personality of Godhead. There is no limit to Your different energies. Therefore only You are competent to instill fearlessness in the hearts of Your devotees. Everyone in the flames of material miseries can find the path of liberation (*a-pavarga*) in You only.”

Bhāg. 1.7.22

2.5.3 Semi-vowels (*antaḥsthas* or *ardhasvaras*)

य palatal	र cerebral	ल dental	व labio-dental
ya	ra	la	va
as in yesterday	as in rub	as in lump	as in won

The consonant *ra* is the only retroflex, or cerebral, written without a dot below it in roman transliteration. Originally, the consonant *va* was sounded labially, like the English bilabial *w*, and thus *va* can be transliterated as *wa*. Nowadays, *va* is pronounced by striking the lower lip on the edge of the upper teeth (labio-dental). It is recommended that practitioners pronounce *va* like an English *w* (rather than an English *v*), except that the lower lip should hit the upper teeth, not the upper lip. However, the consonant *va* is pronounced as *wa* when it is joined with a consonant in the same syllable (as in *svāmī*).

After the twenty-five *sparśas* there are four more consonants: semi-vowels. (For the sake of understanding, they can be thought of as half consonants and half vowels.) They are called semi-vowels because they are produced when a simple vowel moves to the “a” sound:

i + a → ya
r + a → ra
l + a → la
u + a → va

The vowels *i*, *ī*, *r*, *ṛ*, *l*, *l̥*, *u*, and *ū* can change into a corresponding semi-vowel and, thus they are often called consonantals. The following table shows how vowels change into semi-vowels if two words combine and the first word ends with a vowel and the second word begins with a different vowel.

Vowels to semi-vowels		
original ending vowel	becomes	example
i and ī	y	<i>mati + a = matyā, nadi + uttama = nadyuttama, bhakti + āloka = bhaktyāloka</i>
r and ṛ	r	<i>pita + icchā = pitricchā</i>
l and ḷ	l	<i>(rarely used)</i>
u and ū	v	<i>svādu + anna = svādvanna, guru + aṣṭaka = gurvaṣṭaka</i>

The guttural vowels *a* and *ā* have no corresponding semi-vowels. In word combinations, they generally are suffixed with *y*. The non-guttural vowels are shortened by taking *y* or *v*. Thus *i + i-vas = iyivas*, and in *svādvanna* (*svādu anna*), the *u* changes to *v*.

2.5.4 Sibilants

श palatal śa	ष cerebral ṣa	स dental sa
as “sh” in <i>shut</i> or “ch” in the German “ <i>ich</i> ”	as “sh” in <i>shirt</i>	as in <i>sun</i>

These are three unvoiced hissing sounds, which in Sanskrit are known as *uṣman*, which means “heat-producing” when uttered in the mouth. The *śa* is pronounced as a light sound with the tongue in front in the palate (there is a very slight contact of the tongue with the roof of the mouth), which requires attentive rehearsing for the practitioner. *ṣa* is pronounced like the “sh” in *ship* or *wish*, a heavy sound with the tongue pulled back in the far back cerebral (roof) position. Lastly, *sa* (exactly like the English *s*) is pronounced as a pure hissing sound (“sss”), like the “s” in *seek* or *miss*, in the dental position.

There are no voiced sibilants in Sanskrit. A voiced sibilant produces a “z” sound. So never say “*tazmai śrī-gurave namaḥ.*” *Ślokaḥ* (meaning “verse”), *ṣaṭ* (“six”), and *sakala* (“whole”) are three examples for pronouncing the three sibilants. The word *śirṣāsana* (“headstand” in yoga) includes all three sibilants.

Words containing sibilants	
sibilant	example
śa	Śyāma, Śiva, Viśvarūpa śakti, śarīra, śānti
ṣa	Viṣṇu, Vaiṣṇava, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, sṛṣṭi
sa	samśkr̥ta, samśkāra, samsāra, sarga, sambandha, susvāgatam, satya, sundaram, sahasranāma, stotra, sūtra

The Sanskrit novice should repeat the above words again and again to hear the three different sounds of the sibilants. The subtle differences can be mastered with practice. Readers are encouraged to identify more words containing sibilants.

Because Bengalis do not differentiate between the three sibilants, the next table lists words that ISKCON devotees mispronounce with a Bengali accent.

Examples of Bengali mispronunciations of sibilants

original word	mispronunciation
<i>prasāda</i>	<i>praśāda</i>
<i>samsāra</i>	<i>śamśāra</i>
<i>tulasī</i>	<i>tulaśī</i>

2.5.5 Pure Aspirate

Last of the consonants is *ha*, a full puff of air (aspiration) from the throat. (Air flows up from the stomach.) This is voiced.

ह
guttural
<i>ha</i> as in <i>hunger</i> , <i>Hari</i>

2.5.6 Nasals

While pronouncing aspirated syllables and sibilants, air should pass through only the mouth, but when saying nasal consonants it passes through the nose. The last consonant in each of the five rows of *sparśas* is a nasal consonant, or *anunāsika*. These five (*ṇa*, *ṇa*, *ṇa*, *na*, and *ma*) depend upon a flow of air in the nose. For example, *ṇa* is uttered from the throat with air passing through the nose. The consonant *ṇa* proceeds from the palate and nose. So these are all called nasal consonants. They have rightly been called *mukha-nāsika-vacana* (meaning “spoken at the same time in the mouth and nose”) by ancient grammarians. With the nasals, the breath partially passes through the nose, while the tongue or the lips are in positions for articulating the consonant.

Nasal consonants inside words are especially for facilitating pronunciation. For example, in the name *Gaurāṅga*, the *ṇ* is in the *ka-varga* and so is the next consonant *ga*. In other words, the *ṇ* is a guttural sound, and so is the *ga*. The same principle is at work in the names *Pañca-tattva* and *Pāṇḍava* – the consonants following the nasal sounds are in the same *varga* (row) as the nasal consonant. This facilitates pronunciation.

Sometimes there is misuse of *ṇ*, *ṇ*, *ṇ*, and *m*. For example, *samsāra* is occasionally misspelt *saṁsara* or *saṁsara*.

Three of the four semivowels – *य*, *ल*, *व*, or *ya*, *la*, and *va* – may also sometimes be nasal, or *anunāsika*. (Usually in Vedic Sanskrit they are nasal only when they end a word in the plural case.) These nasal semivowels in Devanāgarī are spelled यँ, लँ, वँ. The character ँ marks them as nasal. These three semi-vowels (or half-consonants, so to speak) and the five above-mentioned consonants are *anunāsika*, or nasal consonants, and the remaining twenty-five consonants are not nasal (*an-anunāsika*).

2.5.7 Conjunct Consonants

In Sanskrit, when two or more consonants are sounded one after the other without a vowel in between, they are known as a single conjunct consonant. Here are four examples: *ṅga* in *Gaurāṅga* (the golden-limbed Lord), *ñca* in *pañcāmṛta* (nectar of five drinks), *pra* as in *prajā* (citizens or subjects), and *nma* as in *janma* (birth).

Two symbols signifying conjunct consonants cannot be further broken into components: क्ष = *kṣa* and ज्ञ = *jña*. *Kṣa* is sounded like the roman letter “x”. An example of its use is *kṣatriya*. Bengalis do not utter the full *kṣa* consonant, but rather mispronounce it as *kkha* (they enunciate *kṣatriya* as *kkhatriya*), and elsewhere it is mispronounced as *ccha*. *Jña* also has various articulations: *gya* (the way it is pronounced in Hindi) and *dnya*. It is actually a palatized form of *gna*, and thus the practitioner can learn to pronounce *jña* as *gnya*. (The Sanskrit root *jña* may be the origin of the Latin co-*gno*-*scere*, from which the English word *know* is derived.) To familiarize the reader, here are some examples of the unlimited conjunct consonants in Sanskrit:

ñ	ञ	+	ca	च	=	ñca	ञ	pañca-ratna, tapta-kāñcana
t	त	+	ra	र	=	tra	त्र	mantra, netra, patra, putra, rātri
k	क्	+	ṣa	ष	=	kṣa	क्ष	kṣatriya, kṣamā, kṣīra-cora
j	ज	+	ñ	ञ	=	jña	ज्ञ	jñāna, yajña, jijñāsā, kṣetra-jña
p	प	+	ta	त	=	pta	प्त	sapta-rṣi
ṭ	ट्	+	ṭa	ट	=	ṭṭa	ट्ट	bhaṭṭācārya
d	द्	+	ma	म	=	dma	द्व	padma
d	द्	+	va	व	=	dva	द्व	dvārakā
ñ	ञ्	+	ka	क	=	ñka	ङ्क	rekhāñka
k	क्	+	ta	त	=	kta	क्त	Puruṣa-suktā, bhakta, vaktā
ś	श्	+	ra	र	=	śra	श्र	śravaṇam, śraddhā, Śrīmātī
h	ह	+	ma	म	=	hma	ह्य	brahmā, brāhmaṇa
ṭ	ट्	+	ra	र	=	ṭra	ट्र	Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Mahārāṣṭra
d	द्	+	ga	ग	=	dga	ङ्ग	gadgada
ñ	ञ्	+	ja	ज	=	ñja	ञ्ज	premāñjana
t	त	+	ya	य	=	tya	त्य	satya, mṛtyu
r	र	+	ya	य	=	rya	र्य	sūrya, ārya, ācārya
d	द्	+	dha	ध	=	ddha	द्ध	śuddha, yuddha, buddhi

n	न्	+	d	द्	+	ra	र	=	ndra	न्द्र	Indra, Candra, Mandra
s	स्	+	t	त्	+	ra	र	=	stra	स्त्र	astra, śastra, sāstra
ṣ	ष्	+	ṭ	ट्	+	va	व	=	ṣṭva	ष्ठ	drṣṭvā
n	न्	+	d	द्	+	va	व	=	ndva	न्द्व	dvandva
t	त्	+	t	त्	+	va	व	=	ttva	त्त्व	sattva
n	न्	+	t	त्	+	ya	य	=	ntyā	न्त्य	antya-līlā
p	प्	+	s	स्	+	ya	य	=	psyā	प्स्य	prāpsyasi

2.6 Dependents (Parāśritas)

There are four dependents. Of these four, Sanskrit heavily uses the first two: *anusvāra* and *visarga*. This book mentions the other two, which are rare, in the appendix (A6). The dependents are not called *varṇas*, or letters, for they are used after vowels and require vowels.

Anusvāra: an after-sound. The literal meaning of *anusvara* is “following or dependent upon a vowel.” It is always pronounced after a vowel sound. It is a pure nasal sound that replaces the *m* or *ma* (म् or म्) when it is followed by another consonant. It is usually in the shape of a dot above the letter *m* (*m̐*), but it is not to be pronounced as *m*. It sounds similar to the “n” in the French word “*bon*”. It is presented in Devanāgarī as a dot above a line (◌ं).

Visarga: a short echo of the preceding vowel produced with hard breathing. The short echo of the vowel “a” sounds like a half “*ha*” with breath coming from the chest. (The full consonant “*ha*” requires breath from the stomach.) It is usually found at the end of a word in the shape of an *h* with a dot below it (*ḥ*). In Devanāgarī (:) it looks like a colon.

In the traditional alphabet, the *anusvāra* and *visarga* are appended to the list of vowels for the sake of completeness, and this is the order strictly followed in modern Sanskrit dictionaries. Thus the expanded vowel list is:

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	◌ं	:
<i>a</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>ṛ</i>	<i>ṝ</i>	<i>ḷ</i>	<i>ḹ</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>m̐</i>	<i>ḥ</i>

◌ं अं
<i>m̐</i> <i>aṁ</i> as “n” in the French “ <i>bon</i> ”

The *anusvāra* is easy for Europeans to articulate because it is similar to the “n” in the French word “*bon*”. The *anusvara* is voiced and sounds more like a nasal “*m*” than a nasal “*n*”. In contrast to the nasal stops, which are pronounced in both the mouth and the nasal cavity, the *anusvāra* is sounded only in the nose, while the tongue is poised to articulate the specific preceding vowel that the *anusvāra* supplements. Basically it is a pure nasal humming sound (represented in *om*) produced solely in the nasal cavity. The *anusvāra* should replace a *ma* only when *ma* is followed by a consonant, and should not replace *ma* when *ma* is followed by a vowel. Here is an example from *Bhagavad-gita* (9.16): *aham agnir ahaṁ hutam*.

The *anusvāra* has a cousin called the *candrabindu*. Like the *anusvāra*, a *candrabindu*, symbolized by a dot inside the lower half of a circle (◌◌), is also known as a nasal, *anunāsika*, because this *varṇa* (letter) is also pronounced in the nose (*nāsikā*). This nasal sound is pronounced by breathing out air through both the mouth and the nose (*mukha-nāsikā*).

A *candrabindu* indicates that the previous vowel is to be nasalized, which sounds exactly like the normal vowel except that air is also forced through the nose. A *candrabindu* many times accompanies the conjunct consonant *lla* (ल्ल) to indicate that it is pronounced as a nasalized double *l*. This occurs in the *sandhi* in which the first word ends in *n* and the second begins with *l*, e.g., *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.39): *śraddhā-vān + labhate = śraddhāvāl labhate*.

Most Sanskrit vowels can be either nasalized or unnasalized. To hear the difference, first say the English word “hawk”. Now say the English word “honk”. Next say them together: “hawk honk”. The difference is that in “hawk” virtually no air is forced up through the nose. However, with “honk” we instinctively allow much of the breath to pass through our nasal cavities. Nasalization does not simply mean the presence of the letter “n”, because the vowel in “honk” is nasalized without pronouncing the “n” at all. The word allows us to practice making a nasalized “aa” sound. We should be able to pronounce the first part of “honk” without pronouncing “nk” (i.e., without the tongue ever touching the top of the mouth) and still be able to hear the difference between the sounds of the nasalized and unnasalized vowel. A nasalized vowel is not ended by making the English “n” sound with the tongue.

<p>◌ं</p> <p>अं</p> <p>sounded in the nose</p>
<p>◌ँ</p> <p>अँ</p> <p>accompanying nasal sound</p>

The term *visarga* denotes its existence only at the end of a word. It is never seen in the middle of a word, except in compound words (e.g., *duḥ-kha*), and it is not pronounced there. A *visarga* substitutes for an “s” at the end of a word (e.g., *tapas* → *tapah*) when “s” is followed by any letter or by nothing. It substitutes for a final “r” at the end of a word (e.g., *punar* → *punah*) when the “r” is followed by a hard consonant or by nothing.

<p>◌ः</p> <p>अः</p> <p>sounded in the throat</p>
<p>◌ह</p> <p>अह(a)</p> <p>as an echo of the preceding vowel</p>

A *visarga* is articulated as a hard *ha*, followed by a short echo of the preceding vowel; *iḥ* is pronounced *ihī*, and *aḥ* is pronounced *aha*. Its transliteration is *ḥ*, and it is a hard aspirate, sounded in the position of the preceding vowel, free of any touch of the tongue with any other organ.

There are various opinions about when to pronounce this short echo of the preceding vowel. *Avisarga* is pronounced when it appears at the end of a sentence. In addition, according to authorities, it is echoed only at the end of the second and fourth lines of a verse;

others say that the *visarga* is also sounded at the end of a *pāda* (a quarter of a verse in poetry). It is not sounded when it appears within a line of prose or poetry.

A long vowel before a final *visarga* should still be pronounced long, but the echo should be short (*ah*, *ih*). If the vowel before the final *visarga* is a combined vowel, only the second part of the combined vowel is echoed (*eh*, *aih*, *oh*, *auh*). The following table lists all ten vowel endings that are followed by a *visarga*.

Short vowels	Example	Pronounced as
<i>ākārānta</i>	<i>keśavāḥ</i>	<i>keśavāḥ^a</i>
<i>īkārānta</i>	<i>harīḥ</i>	<i>harīḥⁱ</i>
<i>ūkārānta</i>	<i>viṣṇuḥ</i>	<i>viṣṇuḥ^u</i>
<i>ekārānta</i>	<i>hareḥ</i>	<i>hareḥ^e</i>
<i>okārānta</i>	<i>gāvoh</i>	<i>gāvoh^o</i>

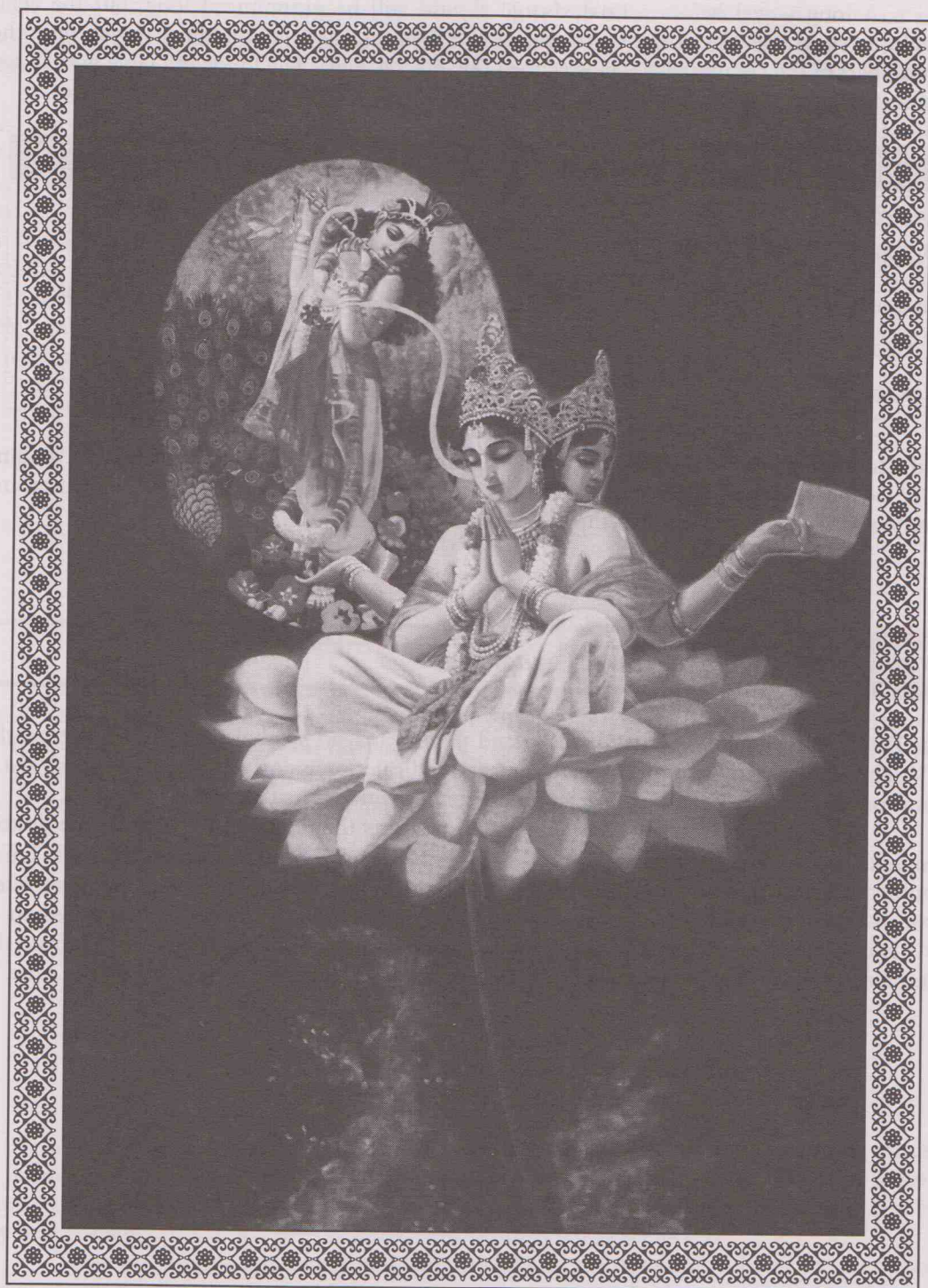
Long vowels	Example	Pronounced as
<i>ākārānta</i>	<i>bhaktāḥ</i>	<i>bhaktāḥ^a</i>
<i>īkārānta</i>	<i>tulasīḥ</i>	<i>tulasīḥⁱ</i>
<i>ūkārānta</i>	<i>svayambhuḥ</i>	<i>svayambhuḥ^u</i>
<i>aikārānta</i>	<i>rāmāiḥ</i>	<i>rāmāiḥⁱ</i>
<i>aukārānta</i>	<i>gauḥ</i>	<i>gauḥ^u</i>

In the left-hand column, *ākārānta* = *akāra* (meaning “the vowel ‘a’”) + *anta* (meaning “ending with”) = the “a” vowel at the end; *īkārānta* = *ikāra* (meaning “the vowel ‘i’”) + *anta* (meaning “ending with”) = the “i” vowel at the end; etc.

2.7 Omission of a Vowel (Avagraha)

The Devanāgarī symbol for *avagraha* is ॐ, and the Devanagari symbol for the double *avagraha* is ॐॐ. The word *avagraha* means “separation” and indicates omission of a vowel. An *avagraha* is not pronounced. It is not an *akṣara*, an indestructible sound – just a written mark.

In Devanāgarī, the single *avagraha*, ॐ, represents the omission of “a”, and the double *avagraha*, ॐॐ, represents the omission of “ā”. In publications of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, double *avagrahas* are not used. In earlier times, the single and double *avagraha* were often unseen in manuscripts. In transliterations, the single *avagraha* (symbolizing the omission of “a”) is indicated by a single quotation mark or an apostrophe ('). Here is an example from the *Bhagavad-gītā* (1.21–22): *me 'cyuta* = *me* + *acyuta* (meaning “my infallible Lord”).



3

Verse Meters (*Chandas*)

Chandas are the topic of the *vedāṅga* that teaches the verse meters in the scriptures. This *vedāṅga* not only describes how to write sentences in metrical form, but the entire prosody, or science of poetic meter, itself is written in metered verses, or *chandas*. This chapter explores the pronunciation of verses based on their specific meters.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thakura said that a mantra requires both proper accentuation (pronunciation) and proper meter (rhythm). Although there are infinite combinations and permutations of meters, Sanskrit academia recognizes about three hundred. Here we introduce only the most common *chandas* so that devotees can properly chant mantras and fully concentrate on them. (The scientific definition of “concentration” is having two or more senses focused on one object.) Concentration will stop the mind from flickering away. The key to a *śloka* is its meter. The following table lists the first eight categories of *chandas*, divided by the number of syllables in the *pāda* (quarter-verse) of each.

Number of syllables per <i>pāda</i>	<i>Chandas</i>
4	<i>pratiṣṭhā</i>
5	<i>supratiṣṭhā</i>
6	<i>gāyatrī*</i>
7	<i>uṣṇik</i>
8	<i>anuṣṭup**</i>
9	<i>vr̥hatī</i>
10	<i>pañkti</i>
11	<i>triṣṭup</i>

*A *chandas* of three *pādas*, each eight syllables long, is called *gāyatrī*. (*Ṛg-veda* 3.62.10 glorifies Lord Nārāyaṇa with an illustrious *gāyatrī* mantra).

**The *anuṣṭup-chandas* is also called *śloka*.

There are seven major *chandas* used in the *Vedas* and seven minor ones. Mahārṣi Vālmīki uses thirteen *chandas* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Vyāsadev uses eighteen *chandas* in the *Mahābhārata*. Almost two hundred and fifty *chandas* are still extant from the classical period.

Someone may desire to know the meter of a verse. The basic rules to follow concern syllables being classified as *laghu* and *guru*, or “light” and “heavy”:

(1) A syllable containing short vowels (i.e., *a*, *i*, *u*, *r* and *l*) but followed by a conjunct consonant, an *anusvara*, or a *visarga* is considered heavy.

(2) A syllable containing short vowels but not followed by a conjunct consonant, an *anusvara*, or a *visarga* is considered light.

(3) A syllable containing long vowels is considered heavy.

(4) The last syllable of a *pāda* (quarter verse) containing short vowels may be considered light or heavy depending upon the requirements of the particular meter.

According to the traditional system, a light syllable is indicated by a straight line (l) and is pronounced short, or in one time unit. A heavy syllable is marked with a ॡ and is pronounced long, or in two time units. (This same symbol (ॡ) is also used to show *avagraha*, or omission of a vowel, but that is not to be confused with its usage in marking meter.)

कृ	ष्णा	य	वा	सु	दे	वा	य
kr	ṣṇā	ya	vā	su	de	vā	ya
ॡ	ॡ	l	ॡ	l	ॡ	ॡ	l
दे	व	की	न	न्द	ना	य	च
de	va	kī	na	nda	nā	ya	ca
ॡ	l	ॡ	ॡ	l	ॡ	l	l
न	न्द	गो	प	कु	मा	रा	य
na	nda	go	pa	ku	mā	rā	ya
ॡ	l	ॡ	l	l	ॡ	ॡ	l
गो	वि	न्दा	य	न	मो	न	मः
go	vi	ndā	ya	na	mo	na	maḥ
ॡ	ॡ	ॡ	l	l	ॡ	l	ॡ

The example here shows an *anuṣṭup* verse in Devanāgarī, followed by the transliteration and symbolic representations of the sequence of heavy and light syllables in each *pāda*.

This verse has eight syllables in each *pāda*. The symbolic representations of heavy and light syllables in the four *pādas* are different. They all have eight syllables, but the distribution of heavy and light syllables differs from one *pāda* to the next. Still, there are some common characteristics. In each *pāda*, the first syllable is heavy and the fifth syllable is light. The first and third *pādas* end with the same pattern: heavy, heavy, light. And the second and fourth *pādas* also end in identical patterns: heavy, light, heavy.

Although *anuṣṭup* verses are the most prominent in classical Sanskrit and nobody has difficulty reciting them, the rules for their composition are relatively complicated.

The next example of a verse meter is taken from the *Brahmā-saṁhitā*. The Devanāgarī letters are grouped into syllables. Note the peculiarity of the divisions shown in the following table. They are divided this way because, in Devanāgarī, ligatures (two consonants) are kept together. This way one can easily see whether a vowel is followed by two consonants.

चि	न्ता	म	णि	प्र	क	र	स	द्म	सु	क	ल्प	वृ	क्ष
ci	ntā	ma	ṇi	pra	ka	ra	sa	dma	su	ka	lpa	vṛ	kṣa
S	S		S				S			S		S	

This is the verse meter of all the fourteen-syllable verses in *Brahma-saṁhitā*. The first syllable *ci*, has a short *i*, but it is followed by the conjunct consonant (*nt*), therefore it is heavy. For the same reason, the syllables *ṇi*, *sa*, *ka* (of *kalpa*) and *vṛ* are also heavy.

The two verses beginning with *śriyaḥ kāntāḥ* are written in a different meter (see the next example). They have seventeen syllables, and there is a slight pause after the sixth syllable. Rule 2 (mentioned above) is applicable for *yaḥ*, *ntaḥ*, and *ṣaḥ*.

श्रि	यः	का	न्ताः	का	न्ताः	प	र	म	पु	रु	षः	क	ल्प	त	र	वो
śri	yaḥ	kā	ntāḥ	kā	ntāḥ	pa	ra	ma	pu	ru	ṣaḥ	ka	lpa	ta	ra	vo
	S	S	S	S	S						S	S				S

The metrical composition of Sanskrit *śloka*s made the verses rhyme beautifully, which facilitated their remembrance by students who memorized the *Vedas* through aural reception.

The science of Sanskrit metrical composition (*chandas*) is covered in a number of learned works. The rules for determining light and heavy syllables are based on the book *Chando-mañjarī*, by Gaṅgādāsa Paṇḍita. Gaṅgādāsa Paṇḍita was Lord Caitanya's grammar teacher, as mentioned in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*:

gaṅgādāsa paṇḍita-sthāne padena vyākaraṇa
śravaṇa-mātre kaṇṭhe kaila sūtra-vṛtti-gaṇa

When the Lord was studying grammar at the place of Gaṅgādāsa Paṇḍita, He would immediately learn grammatical rules and definitions by heart simply by hearing them once.

(CC Ādi-līla 15.5)

Similarly, *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* describes:

In his eighth year, Nimai was admitted into the *tola* of Gaṅgādāsa Paṇḍita in Gaṅgānagara close by the village of Māyāpur. In two years he became well read in Sanskrit grammar and rhetoric. His readings after that were of the nature of self-study in his own house, where he had found all-important books belonging to his father, who was a *paṇḍita* himself.

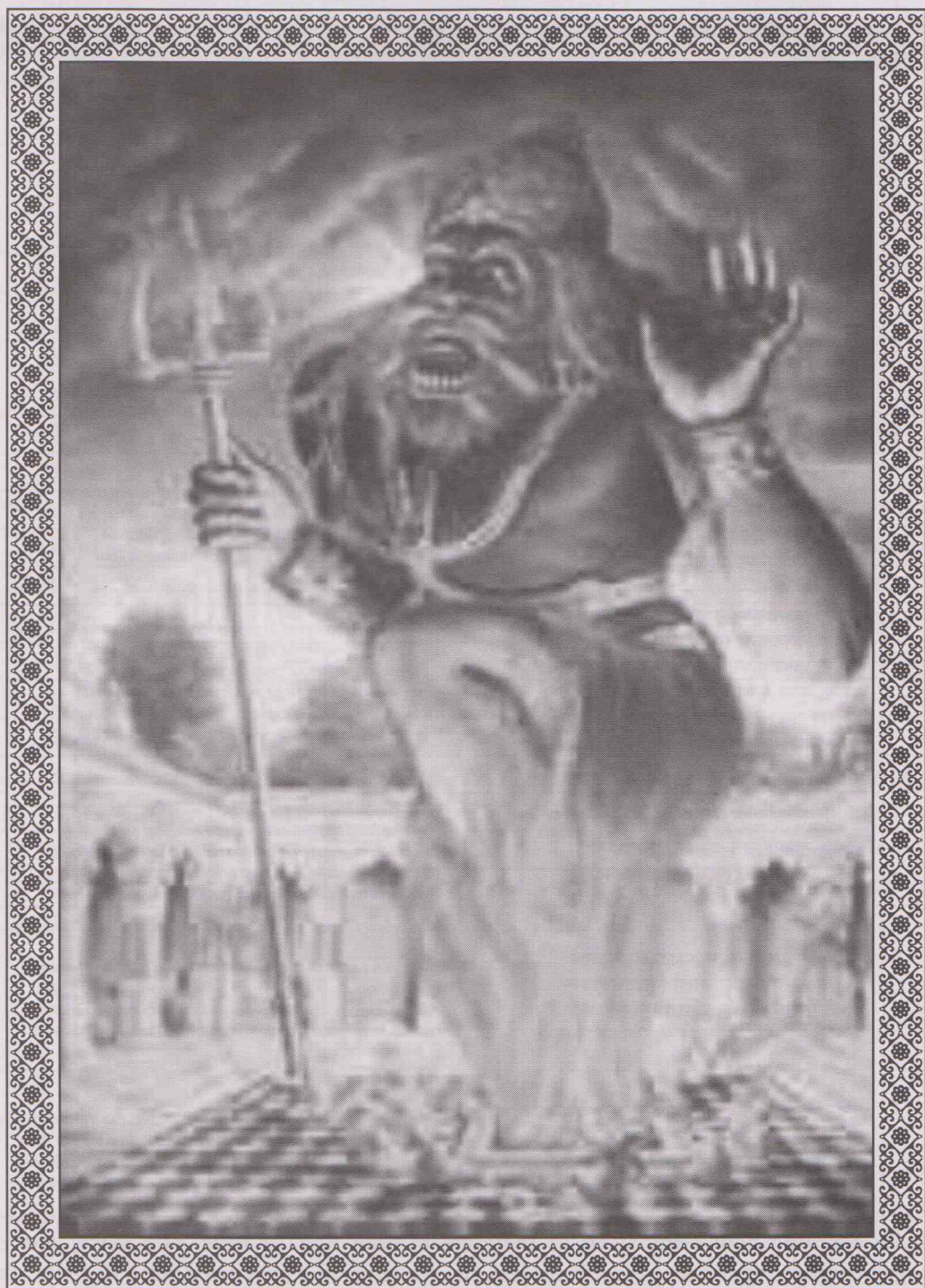
This table gives the names of common verse meters.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
8	X	X	X	X		S	S	X														Anuṣṭup
	X	X	X	X		S		X														
10			S			S		S		S												viyoginī
+11			S	S			S		S		S											
11	S	S		S	S			S		S	S											indra-vajrā
11		S		S	S			S		S	S											upendra-vajrā
11	X	S		S	S			S		S	S											upajāti
11	S	S	S	S			S	S		S	S											vāṭormī
12				S			S			S		S										druta-vilambita
12	S	S		S	S			S		S		S										indra-vaṁśā
14	S	S		S				S			S		S	S								vasanta-tilakā
17		S	S	S	S	S						S	S				S					śikhariṇī
17	S	S	S	S						S	S		S	S		S	S					mandākrāntā
19	S	S	S			S		S				S	S	S		S	S		S			śārdūla-vikrīḍita
21	S	S	S	S		S	S						S	S		S	S		S	S		srag-dharā
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	

Enumerated below are the eight most common examples of verse meters in our daily prayers (the left column shows the number of syllables in each *pāda*, or quarter verse):

#	Sanskrit	Roman Transliteration
8	हरे कृष्ण हरे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हरे हरे हरे राम हरे राम राम राम हरे हरे	hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare
11	संसारदावानललीढलोक त्राणाय कारुण्यघनाघनत्वम् प्राप्तस्य कल्याणगुणार्णवस्य वन्दे गुरोः श्रीचरणारविन्दम्	samsāra-dāvānala-līḍha-loka trāṇāya kārūṇya-ghanāghanatvam prāptasya kalyāṇa-guṇārṇavasya vande guroh śrī-caraṇāravindam
12	नमामीश्वरं सच्चिदानन्दरूपं लसत्कुण्डलं गोकुले भ्राजमानम् यशोदाभियोलूखलाद्भवमानं परामृष्टमत्यन्ततो द्रुत्य गोप्या	namāmiśvaram sac-cid-ānanda-rūpaṁ lasat-kuṇḍalam gokule bhrājamānam yaśodā-bhiyolūkhalaḍ dhavamānam parāmṛṣṭam atyantato drutya gopyā
14	अङ्गानि यस्य सकलेन्द्रियवृत्तिमन्ति पश्यन्ति पान्ति कलयन्ति चिरं जगन्ति आनन्दचिन्मयसदुज्ज्वलविग्रहस्य गोविन्दमादिपुरुषं तमहं भजामि	aṅgāni yasya sakalendriya-vṛtti-manti paśyanti pānti kalayanti ciraṁ jaganti ānanda-cinmaya-sad-ujjvala-vigrahasya govindam ādi-puruṣam tam ahaṁ bhajāmi
15	कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण हे कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण माम् कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण कृष्ण पाहि माम् राम राघव राम राघव राम राघव रक्ष माम् कृष्ण केशव कृष्ण केशव कृष्ण केशव पाहि माम्	kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa he kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mām kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa pāhi mām rāma rāghava rāma rāghava rāma rāghava rakṣā mām kṛṣṇa keśava kṛṣṇa keśava kṛṣṇa keśava pāhi mām
17	कदाचित्कालिन्दीतटविपिनसङ्घीतकरवो मुदाभीरीनारीवदनकमलास्वादमधुपः रमाशम्भुब्रह्मामरपतिगणेशार्चितपदो जगन्नाथः स्वामी नयनपथगामी भवतु मे	kadācit kālindī-taṭa-vipina-saṅgītaka-ravo mudābhīrī-nārī-vadana-kamalāśvāda-madhupah ramā-śambhu-brahmāmara-pati-gaṇeśārcita-pado jagannāthaḥ svāmī nayana-patha-gāmī bhavatu me
19	चेतोदर्पणमार्जनं भवमहादाघनिर्वापणं श्रेयःकैरवचन्द्रिकावितरणं विद्यावधूजीवनम् आनन्दाम्बुधिर्वहनं प्रतिपदं पूर्णामृतास्वादनं सर्वात्मक्षपणं परं विजयते श्रीकृष्णसन्कीर्तनम्	ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam bhava-mahā-dāvāgni-nirvāpanam śreyaḥ-kairava-candrikā-vitaranam vidyā-vadhū-jīvanam ānandāmbudhi-varধানam prati-padam pūrṇāmṛtāśvādanam sarvātma-snapanam param vijayate śrī-kṛṣṇa-sankīrtanam
21	वन्देऽहं श्रीगुरोः श्रीयुतपदकमलं श्रीगुरुन् वैष्णवांश्च श्रीरूपं साग्रजातं सहगणरघुनाथान्वितं तं स जीवम् साद्वैतं सावधूतं परिजनसहितं कृष्णचैतन्यदेवं श्रीराधाकृष्णपादान् सहगणललिताश्रीविशाखान्वितांश्च	vande 'haṁ śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalam śrī-gurun vaiṣṇavāṁś ca śrī-rūpaṁ sāgrajātaṁ saha-gaṇa-raghu-nāthānvitaṁ taṁ sa jīvam sādvaitam sāvadhūtaṁ parijana-sahitaṁ kṛṣṇa-caitanya-devam śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-pādan saha-gaṇa-lalitā- śrī-viśākhānvitāṁś ca

Just by counting how many syllables there are in each line, or *pāda*, of a verse, one can recognize which tune to sing it in. If readers can recognize the meter of a verse this way, they will have no difficulty reciting any verse in our Vaiṣṇava scriptures.



4

Mispronunciation (Aśuddha-uccāraṇam)

4.1 Principles

Accurate pronunciation will be achieved by following some standard general principles described in this chapter. Mistakes fall into two main categories: those caused by conditioning and those due to inattentiveness.

4.1.1 Conditioning (Baddhata)

All cultures or nationalities have their own multifarious dictions, which are usually hard to change for devotees learning Sanskrit pronunciation. East Asians cannot pronounce “r” and pronounce it as “l”. “R” is pronounced gutturally by Americans and is ignored (or said contact free) by the British. Many variations in pronunciation occur under the influence of local languages, from region to region and country to country.

Each language can exert its influence on the pronunciation of Sanskrit. Americans sometimes replace “t” with a “d” sound. So they pronounce *dhoti* as *ḍoṭi*. Britishers tend to say all “a” sounds like the “a” in “ant.” Australians tend to make all “a” sounds the same as the “a” in “man.” American devotees have a hard time pronouncing aspirated letters, which are nonexistent in the English alphabet. Thus they mispronounce *bhakti* as *bākti*.

Western and Northern Indians tend to drop the short “a” sound at the end of a Sanskrit word. They say *Rām* instead of *Rāma*. Subsequently, further deviation occurs when conjunct consonants end a word because an “a” has to be added to articulate the ending. For example, *janma* becomes *janm* by dropping the ending vowel, and then, to be able to articulate the new ending, the word further becomes *janam*. “Kṛṣṇa” transforms into “Kṛṣṇ” by omitting the “a” and is then articulated as Krishan or Kishan, which is how most North Indians address Lord Kṛṣṇa. Many Indians also mispronounce *phala* (meaning “fruit”) as *fal*. The Sanskrit alphabet does not include a “fa” sound. This “fa” was brought into India by the Persians.

East India (Bengal) has these variations in its dialect:

- A conjunct consonant is simplified into a single stressed consonant. So “Nityānanda” is pronounced as Niṭānanda (the *t* is pronounced as *tt*, and the *y* is subtly pronounced); *kṣatriya* as *khatriya*, *caḥṣu* as *caḥhu*, *Parikṣit* as *Parikhit*.
- The short “a” is articulated as “o”; so *Hare* becomes *Hore*.
- The “ai” is enunciated as “oi”; thus *Caitanya* becomes *Coitonno*.
- The “au” is changed to “ou”; so *Gaurāṅga* becomes *Gourāngo*.
- The semivowel “ya” is altered to “ja”, causing *Yamunā* to become *Jamunā*.
- The semivowel “va” is voiced as “ba”; so *Vṛndāvana* is pronounced *Brndābono* or *Brndābon*. The consonant “va” is *dantaṣṭhya* (labio-dental) and so should not be pronounced only labially. And while pronouncing it dentolabially, it should sound quite distinct from “ba.” Conditioning or lack of care could make the two sound the same, which may be the reason why Bengalis do not distinguish between them.

- In Bengali speech and phonetics, there is practically no distinction between the sibilants: *śa*, *ṣa*, and *sa*. All three are mostly pronounced *ṣa* in Bengali talk. Here are a few examples: *sat* (meaning “existence”) is replaced by *ṣot*; *satya* (meaning “truth”) transforms into *ṣoto*; and *sattva* (“goodness”) converts to *ṣotto*.
- An extra “y” is added prior to the “o” in *praṇāma mantras*. Thus Bengalis say “*namayom*” instead of “*nama om*.”

Maybe it is no coincidence that the English word “lucky” (a synonym for “fortunate”) sounds very similar to *Lokhī*, which is how Bengalis address *Lakṣmī*, the Goddess of Fortune.

Gujaratis and Maharashtrians pronounce *r* as *ru*. Instead of saying “*Kṛṣṇa*”, they say “*Kruṣṇa*”. Some Gujaratis also reverse *sa* and *śa*, and vice versa. And instead of *ṛṣi*, they say *ruṣi*:

Dr. Patel: A modern *rushi*.

Prabhupāda: What is that *rushi*?

Dr. Patel: *Rushi*.

Prabhupāda: Oh, *ṛṣi*, yes.

Dr. Patel: You call it *ṛṣi*, and we call it *rushi*. That is the difference in pronunciation.

Prabhupāda: Just like the Oriyas. They call “*Krushna*”.

Dr. Patel: *Krushna*, yes. They cannot even say “*Kṛṣṇa*”.

Prabhupāda: They cannot say “*Kṛṣṇa*”; they say “*Krushna*”.

Dr. Patel: We call “*Kreshna*”. You call “*Kṛṣṇa*”, and they call “*Krushna*”.

Prabhupāda: Yes. *Bhāva-grāhi janārdana*: but *Kṛṣṇa* can understand who is asking for Him [laughter].

Conversation, Feb. 17, 1974

The Polish accent is always on the second-to-the-last syllable. Somehow Polish devotees also make this happen when they pronounce Sanskrit words.

In Portugese, the letters “t” and “d” are pronounced like “c” and “j”, respectively. These sounds are often transferred to the Portugese devotees’ Sanskrit pronunciation: *govindam āji-purusam* and *dhoci* (for *dhotī*).

Spanish devotees pronounce “j” as “y”. Thus *jaya jagannātha* becomes *yaya yagannātha*. Spanish devotees should also be trained to distinguish between *ma* and *na*.

The French and Italians have difficulty pronouncing “h”, so French devotees may say “*are*” for *Hare*, and “*aribol*” instead of *Haribol*.

The Germans, Austrians, and Swiss are not trained to distinguish between the individual consonants of all five *vargas*; they interchange *k(h)a* and *g(h)a*, *c(h)a* and *j(h)a*, *t(h)a* and *d(h)a*, *t(h)a* and *d(h)a*, *p(h)a* and *b(h)a* (shown in chart with gray background).

Guttural (kaṇṭhya)	a	ā	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṇa	ha	ḥ
Palatal (tālavya)	i	ī	ca	cha	ja	jha	ṇa	ya	śa
Cerebral (mūrdhanya)	r	ṛ	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa	ra	ṣa
Dental (dantya)	l	l̥	ta	tha	da	dha	na	la	sa
Labial (osthya)	u	ū	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	va	

In general, Western alphabets do not distinguish between *ka-kha*, *ga-gha*, *ca-cha*, *ja-jha*, *ṭa-ṭha*, *ḍa-ḍha*, *ta-tha*, *da-dha*, *pa-pha*, and *ba-bha*. The distinction between these consonants that Westerners need to learn is that the first of each pair is unaspirated and the second is aspirated (see section 2.5.1).

All non-Indians should also learn to distinguish between short and long vowels *a-ā*, *i-ī*, *u-ū*, *r-ṛ*, *l-ḷ* (dropped out in the black box on the previous chart) and to recognize the subtle difference in pronunciation between the cerebrals and dentals: *ṭa-ta*, *ṭha-tha*, *ḍa-da*, *ḍha-dha*, and *ṇa-na* (the blocked rows in the previous chart).

4.1.2 Inattentiveness (*Pramāda*)

Some devotees just cannot change their diction because of their cultural conditioning in language. However, sometimes devotees just do not pay attention. Prabhupāda insisted on diacritics and wanted us to pronounce correctly. Inattentiveness and laziness primarily manifest in two types of mispronunciation: blurring the distinction between long and short vowels and ignoring double consonants and double vowels.

Blurring the distinction between long and short vowels

One of the most important causes of Westerners' mispronunciation of Sanskrit is confusing the long and short vowels. Every language has its own long and short accents for vowels. In English, words are generally pronounced by stressing the beginning and the last vowels and leaving the middle vowel unaccented. For example, "geography" is pronounced by stressing the first "o" and the last vowel, "y". Indians unaccustomed to English pronunciation often mispronounce "geography" by overstressing the middle vowel, "a". Similarly, in Hindi and Sanskrit words in which the middle vowels are long (i.e., be held twice as long), as in *Rāmāyaṇa* and *vyāsāsana*, native English speakers often switch the long accent on the second (or middle) vowel to the third vowel. Syllables in Sanskrit are distinguished by their duration (called "heavy" and "light"), but not by additional or less stress on them.

We recommend when pronouncing Sanskrit that devotees exaggerate the difference between the long and the short vowels, which never sounds bad, and actually, if practiced and perfected, comes out sounding nice and natural. Illustrating the difference between the distinct sounds "a" and "ā", this table lists monosyllabic English words:

Words with a vowel sounding like "a"	Words with a vowel sounding like "ā"
gun	gone
fun	fawn
but	bought
rut	rot
pun	pawn
shut	shot
cut	caught

Ignoring double consonants and double vowels

In English, double consonants are usually pronounced as a single consonant. For example, "happy" is usually pronounced "hapy", though it has a double p. However,

in Sanskrit, one must make sure to enunciate twice as long on both the long vowels and the double consonants. Everything in Sanskrit must be pronounced exactly as it is written.

Both these principles can be summarized by the technical distinction between *laghu* and *guru*, which may be difficult to understand, but when the principles governing the distinction are applied, half the problems in Sanskrit pronunciation are solved.

4.1.3 *Guru* (long) vs. *Laghu* (short) Syllables

Just to repeat some material, *guru* means “heavy”, and *laghu* means “light”. A *guru* syllable has at least one of these three characteristics:

1. A long vowel (*ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ṛ*, *Ṍ*, *e*, *ai*, *o*, *au*). The vowel *e* is always long in Sanskrit; there is no such thing as a short *e*. For example, the Sanskrit word *setu* (“bridge”) is never pronounced with a short *e*.
2. The vowel is followed by a conjunct consonant, or *saṃyuktākṣara*. For example, in *Kṛṣṇa*, the first syllable has an *ṛ*, which is a short vowel, but it is followed by *ṣṇ*, a conjunct consonant, so *Kṛ* is a *guru* syllable. *Bha* and *gha* are not conjunct consonants, but *kṣa* and *jña* are.
3. The vowel is followed by an *anusvāra* (*ṁ*) or a *visarga* (*ḥ*). The *anusvāra* and *visarga* are never followed by another vowel. In *patraṃ* (“leaf”), the first syllable, *pa*, is *guru*, because it is followed by the conjunct consonant *tra*. *Tra* is also a *guru* syllable because it is followed by an *anusvāra*.

Laghu is everything that is left over, anything that does not have any of these three characteristics. *Guru* syllables are emphasized or accentuated when they are pronounced, and *laghu* syllables are not.

4.1.4 The Division of Sanskrit Texts and Syllables

For correct pronunciation of Sanskrit, it is essential to know where to break words into syllables. It will be helpful for a novice to point with the index finger and mentally note each distinct syllable while reading Sanskrit. When speaking, the long vowels should be exaggerated. And with a wide-open mouth novices should ensure that they are placing the tongue at the correct points of articulation for the given consonants. Practitioners will also find it helpful to focus on one group of Sanskrit sounds at a time.

The nucleus of each syllable is a vowel. One or more consonants may be attached to the vowel, or it may stand alone. A syllable may have one or more consonants followed by a vowel: e.g., *murāre* = *mu* + *rā* + *re*; *prajā* = *pra* + *jā*; *guro* = *gu* + *ro*; *krośa* = *kro* + *śa*; *rāma* = *rā* + *ma*; *vajra* = *va* + *jra*; *gopāla* = *go* + *pā* + *la*.

If a word ends with one or more consonants and the next word begins with a vowel, the syllables are divided as follows: *gurum api* = *gu* + *ru* + *ma* + *pi*; *puruṣaṃ āha* = *pu* + *ru* + *ṣa* + *mā* + *ha*.

A four-line verse is divided into four quarters, or *pādas*. If a vowel begins a *pāda*, or quarter line, the vowel alone constitutes the syllable, e.g., *uvāca* = *u* + *vā* + *ca*; *akāma* = *a* + *kā* + *ma*; *uttīrya* = *u* + *tī* + *rya*. If a consonant is at the end of a *pāda*, it is pronounced with the preceding vowel: *suvāk* = *su* + *vāk*; *aghabhit* = *a* + *gha* + *bhit*; *tīryak* = *tī* + *ryak*. The *anusvāra*

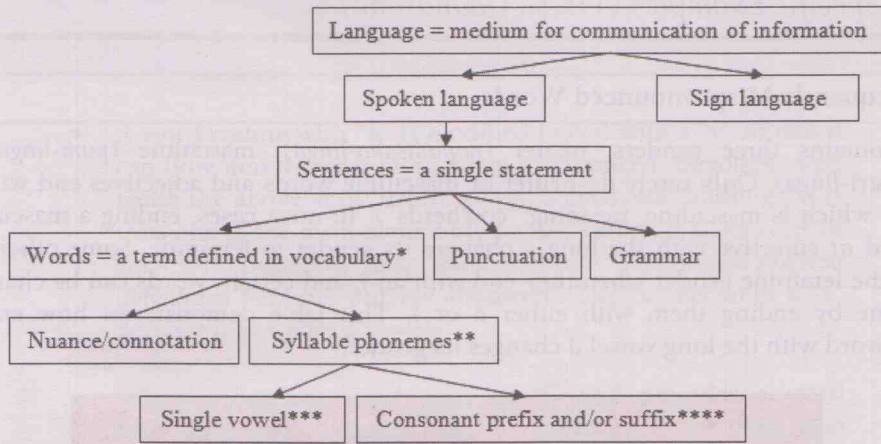
and *visarga* are considered as consonants for the purpose of syllabification. Thus *harim murārim uvāca* = *ha + riṁ + mu + rā + ri + mu + vā + ca*.

The standard way to divide syllables is further illustrated by these examples: *Bhagavad-gītā* = *bha + ga + va + dgī + tā*; *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* = *śrī + ma + dbhā + ga + va + tam*; *Kaunteya* = *kau + nte + ya*; *kudṛṣā* = *ku + dṛ + śā*; *rājarṣiḥ* = *rā + ja + rṣiḥ*; *pañkti* = *pa + ŋkti*; *Paundraka* = *pau + ṇdra + ka*; *kṛtsnam* = *kṛ + tsnam*; *kārtsnyena* = *kā + rtsnye + na*.

A nuance in dividing syllables is explained as follows: A syllable primarily consists of a vowel prefixed and/or suffixed with consonants. In a short-voweled syllable, the vowel sound may be affected by both its prefix and suffix. In a long-voweled syllable, the vowel sound is affected only by its prefix, and there is an audible break between the long vowel and its suffix. The table here illustrates this.

<i>Bhagavad-gītā</i>	<i>Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam</i>
<i>Bha + ga + vad</i>	<i>Bhā + ga + va + tam</i>
<i>Bha + ga</i> (first way)	<i>Bhā + ga</i> (correct division)
<i>Bhag + a</i> (second way)	<i>Bhāg + a</i> (incorrect)
When the vowel is short, the syllable can be divided either way.	When the vowel is long, it is separated from its suffix.
Phonetic Analysis: In the first syllable, the root sound "a" is prefixed by "bh", suffixed by "g", and followed by the syllables in "avad".	Phonetic Analysis: In the first syllable, the root sound "ā" is prefixed by "bh" and followed by the subsequent syllables in "gavatam".

The following table shows the place of syllables in reference to other components of language.



*The vocabularies of languages are built up through conventional usage of words, which are formally defined in dictionaries for written languages. Usage and convention are more important in cultures where the language is only spoken and never written, e.g., Kacchi, in northwestern Gujarat.

**A Sanskrit syllable contains only one vowel, which is its root sound.

***The number of vowels and syllables is exactly the same in a Sanskrit word. However, one must remember that combined vowels (such as *ai* and *au*) are to be counted as a single vowel,

not two. For example, the word *kaunteya* (“son of Kunti”) comprises three syllables only: *kau* + *nte* + *ya*. Dividing it into four syllables (*ka* + *un* + *te* + *ya*) is incorrect. Practitioners need to recognize combined vowels as single characters and single sounds. Transliterating Sanskrit words into Roman diacritics has its limitations, one of which is that the English script does not have all the alphabetical characters needed to represent all the Sanskrit sounds. This is reconciled by using combinations of English letters to represent some Sanskrit sounds.

****A single syllable may comprise any of various combinations and permutations of conjunct consonants. The word *mūrdhnya* (meaning “of the cerebrum”) is comprised of the two syllables *mū* + *rdhnya*. An English reader may be amazed to see such a complicated conjunct consonant as ‘*rdhnya*’ in the second syllable.

4.1.5 Reciting Verses

In verse recitation, a word beginning with a vowel should be recited without a pause or break immediately after the previous word. In such a case, the two words should be mentally joined. That is, the gap between the two words should be ignored (just as in English we say “it-is” when reading “it is”). For example, in the third line of *Bhagavad-gītā* 12.1: *ye cāpy akṣaram avyaktam*, the words *cāpy* and *akṣaram* are to be recited as a flow of sounds, without a pause between the words: *ye-cā-pya-kṣa-ra-ma-vya-ktam*. Sanskrit is scientifically arranged for phonetic pronunciation. Letters are transformed according to other letters and words around them so that they flow freely over the tongue. This system is called *sandhi*.

4.2 Specific Examples (Viśeṣa Udāharaṇa)

4.2.1 Frequently Mispronounced Words

Sanskrit contains three genders: neuter (*napuṃsaka-liṅga*), masculine (*puṃ-liṅga*), and feminine (*strī-liṅga*). Only rarely do neuter or masculine words and adjectives end with an *ā* (e.g., *gopā*, which is masculine, meaning “cowherds”). In most cases, ending a masculine or neuter word or adjective with the long *ā* changes its gender to feminine. Some other words change to the feminine gender when they end with an *ī*, and certain words can be changed to the feminine by ending them with either *ā* or *ī*. This table demonstrates how ending a masculine word with the long vowel *ā* changes its gender.

Sanskrit gender endings		
masculine	feminine	English
<i>suta</i>	<i>sutā</i>	son / daughter
<i>bālaka</i>	<i>bālikā</i>	boy / girl
<i>aśva</i>	<i>aśvā</i>	stallion / mare
<i>bhagavān</i>	<i>bhagavatī</i>	God / Goddess
<i>deva</i>	<i>devī</i>	demigod / demigoddess
<i>śaktimān</i>	<i>śakti</i>	energetic / energy
<i>dāsa</i>	<i>dāsī</i>	servant / maidservant

Praśānta is a name for boys, and Praśāntā is a girl's name. Vilāsinī, Chandrikā, and Vāsinī are examples of feminine names. Śrīla Vyāsadeva is Satyavatī-suta, the son of Satyavatī; mispronouncing his name as Satyavatī-sutā would be a misnomer. Vṛṣabhānu-sutā is Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, but Vṛṣabhānu-suta could refer to either Śrīdāmā or Subala, her two brothers. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu is Śacī-suta, Lord Balarāma is Rohiṇī-suta, and Lord Kṛṣṇa is Devakī-suta (however, pronouncing the ending “a” very long will refer to the “daughter” of Devakī, Subhadrā). Similarly, Kṛṣṇā (note the long, ending ā) is a name of Draupadī, not Kṛṣṇa.

In ISKCON, before the days of diacritics and the transliteration system that we now have of spelling Sanskrit names scientifically, the names were spelled phonetically (e.g., Krishna, instead of Kṛṣṇa, and Nrisingha for Nṛsimha) in an attempt to get the pronunciation correct. Devotees would pronounce *simha* as *singha*, and thus many devotees still say Nrisingha.

The following verse contains examples of conjunctions.

नष्टप्रायेष्वभद्रेषु नित्यं भागवतसेवया ।
भगवत्युत्तमश्लोके भक्तिर्भवति नैष्ठिकी ॥

*naṣṭa-prāyeṣv abhadreṣu
nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā
bhagavatya uttama-śloke
bhaktir bhavati naiṣṭhikī*



By regular attendance in classes on the *Bhāgavatam* and by rendering of service to the pure devotee, all that is troublesome to the heart is almost completely destroyed, and loving service unto the Personality of Godhead, who is praised with transcendental songs, is established as an irrevocable fact.

Bhāg. 1.2.18

- A word ending with “u” is modified to end with a “v” so that it can flow into the next word when pronounced. Devotees often recite the above verse before giving a class, and although it is thus one of the most commonly recited verses, it is also one of the most commonly mispronounced one. The phrase *prāyeṣu abhadreṣu* becomes *prāyeṣv abhadreṣu*. The “u” becomes a “v” because it precedes a vowel.
- When a Sanskrit word ends in “i” and precedes a word beginning with a vowel, the “i” becomes a “y” This also changes the pronunciation. For example, in the last line of the fourth verse of the *Dāmodarāṣṭaka* prayers, the third and fourth words become joined: *sadā me manasy āvirāstām kim anyaiḥ*. The third word, *manasi*, is followed by *āvirāstām*. The ending “i” becomes a “y” in *manasi* so that it can flow into the next word: *manasy āvirāstām*. These two words are fluently pronounced as a single word.

This table shows how masculine nouns are transformed into the dative case.

Some Sanskrit dative cases		
ending	noun	dative case
i	giri	giraye
	muni	munaye
	hari	haraye
a	rāma	rāmāya
	hara	harāya
	kṛṣṇa	kṛṣṇāya
	śiva	śivāya
	preṣṭha	preṣṭhāya
	prada	pradāya
	vadānya	vadānyāya



kṛṣṇāya namaḥ

This table shows similar-sounding words with different meanings.

Some similar-sounding words				
dām	price (Hindi)		dhāma	abode
dāl	lentils (Hindi)		ḍāla	tree branch
bāsi	rotten (Hindi)		bhāsi	swim
pīta, pītā	yellow, drunk		pītā	father
Kuntī-mālā	Kuntī's garland		kaṇṭhi-mālā	neckbeads
dakṣiṇa	South		dakṣiṇā	donation

This table lists some uncommon yet now standardized ISKCON mispronunciations of Sanskrit, Bengali, and Hindi words.

Some commonly mispronounced words		
mispronunciation(s)	correct word	definition
<i>seeka</i>	<i>śikhā</i>	tuft of hair at the back of a male's head
<i>prasāda</i>	<i>prasāda</i>	mercy
<i>mañjarī</i>	<i>mañjarī</i>	flower bud, young maidservant
<i>sankirtān</i>	<i>saṅkīrtana</i>	congregational chanting
<i>Brindaban, Vrindaban</i>	<i>Vṛndāvana</i>	the forest of Vṛndā Devī
<i>brāmana</i>	<i>brāhmaṇa</i>	a priest
<i>sānatān</i>	<i>sanātana</i>	eternal
<i>śrīmātī, śrimate</i>	<i>śrīmātī</i>	beautiful
<i>anānda</i>	<i>ānanda</i>	bliss
<i>pārikrām</i>	<i>parikramā</i>	circumambulation
<i>purnīm</i>	<i>pūrṇimā</i>	full-moon night
<i>bramacārī, bhramcārī</i>	<i>brahmacārī</i>	celibate student
<i>āroti, ārti</i>	<i>ārati</i>	Deity worship ceremony
<i>Bhāgavatām</i>	<i>Bhāgavatam</i>	the scripture most dear to devotees
<i>guru-pūj</i>	<i>guru-pūjā</i>	worship of the guru
<i>caritamrītā</i>	<i>caritāmṛta</i>	nectar of divine activities
<i>līlamrīta</i>	<i>līlāmṛta</i>	nectar of pastimes
<i>harebol, harbol</i>	<i>haribol</i>	a greeting “recite the names of Hari”
<i>jugga, jagya</i>	<i>yajña</i>	sacrifice
<i>pīṭā, pīta</i>	<i>pitaḥ or pitā</i>	father
<i>sampradāyā</i>	<i>sampradāya</i>	disciplic succession



Near her house, a girl wrongly addresses her father as “pitā,” or a drunk.

The correct address for the father is *pitā*.

To honor the father, a child should be trained to call him *pitāji* or *pitāsrī*.

4.2.2 Frequently Mispronounced Names

All over ISKCON, many devotees hear and speak their names with complete disregard to their proper pronunciation. Even during lectures and public presentations, devotees improperly articulate these names. This not only discredits ISKCON, but the audience may misunderstand what name the speaker is discussing. All devotees should ensure that their own names and other devotees' names are properly spelt and articulated. This will harbor a spirit of respect and understanding for our names. Spiritual names of devotees are originally names of the Lord and His devotees, which when uttered appropriately will result in a purifying experience.

Some commonly mispronounced names

incorrect	correct
Prabhupadā, Prabhupādā, Praopād	Prabhupāda
Subhādra	Subhadrā
Narāyen, Narāin	Nārāyaṇa
Luxmi, Lucky, Lokhi	Lakṣmī
Narāda, Narada	Nārada
Rukmīnī	Rukmiṇi
Devki, Devāki	Devakī
Kṛṣṇa (name of Draupadī)	Kṛṣṇā
Ṭakūr	Ṭhākura
Yādubār	Yaduvara
Hurry-sorry	Hari-śauri
Pralāḍananda, Pralāḍānandan	Prahlādānanda
Kīrtananda	Kīrtanānanda
Dīnanāt, Dinānāth	Dīnanātha
Caru	Cāru
Dāmodār	Dāmodara
Bakṭa	Bhakta
Prelād	Prahlāda
Gaurasundār	Gaurasundara
Govindām	Govindam
Gadhādhara, Gadedhara	Gadādhara
Keśāv	Keśava
Prabaviṣṇu, Prabhāviṣṇu	Prabhaviṣṇu
Yiśoḍa, Yaśodhā	Yaśodā
Nāṇḍa	Nanda



5

Mistakes in Prayers (Prārthanānām Asat Uccāraṇam)

5.1

Śrīla Prabhupāda Praṇāti

*nama¹ om² viṣṇu-pādāya³ kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya⁴ bhū⁵-tale
śrīmate⁶ bhaktivedānta-svāmīn⁷ iti nāmine*

1. Nāma or namā are both common mispronunciations. Elongating the ending “a” for musical symphony does not alter the meaning. However, ending the word with “ā” does alter the meaning. Since it is difficult to distinguish between the two sounds “a” and “ā”, we recommend exaggerating the difference for clarity.
2. Sometimes devotees erroneously add “y” before the om, but it does not “improve” the flow from nama to om.
3. Viṣṇu-pādāya is often replaced by viṣṇu-padāya; this is incorrect.
4. Kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya is sometimes mispronounced kṛṣṇa-priṣṭhāya or kṛṣṇa-prasthāya; both change the meaning.
5. The vowel is long in bhū.
6. Pronouncing śrīmati is wrong in this context, as its real use is in reference to ladies. The proper pronunciation here is śrīmate (also, not śrīmāte, as sometimes pronounced with a Western accent).
7. Because of sandhi and the next word starting with “i”, the ending “n” in svāmīn is doubled.

*namas te⁸ sārāsvate deve⁹ gaura-vāñī-pracāriṇe
nirviśeṣa-śūnyavādi-pāścātya¹⁰-deśa-tāriṇe*

8. Nāmaste and namāste are both wrong. Namaste alone is correct.
9. Sārāsvate deve refers to A. C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda, the son or servant of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.
To pronounce it sarasvatī devi misconstrues the verse as worship of goddess Sarasvatī. Sārāsvate devam is grammatically correct, but this does not sound as rhetorically ornate as sārāsvate deve.
Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended in a lecture on August 10, 1971: “You should pronounce it sārāsvate, not sārāsvatī. Sarasvatī is my spiritual master. So his disciple is sārāsvate.”
10. The Western world is referred to in Sanskrit as pāścātya, which is often mispronounced as paścātyā or paśyāta.

1. Considering the Sanskrit grammatical rules, “Gurv-aṣṭaka” should not be pronounced “Guruvāṣṭakam”.

samsāra²-dāvānala-līḍha-loka³-
trāṇāya⁴ kārūṇya⁵-ghanāghanatvam⁶
prāptasya kalyāṇa-guṇārṇavasya⁷
vande guroḥ⁸ śrī⁹-caraṇāravindam¹⁰

2. Bengali pronunciation changes “s” to “ś” and “a” to “o”, which results in śomśāra. However, adhering to Sanskrit pronunciation for Sanskrit verses is recommended. The anusvāra “m” in samsāra is neither a regular “n” nor a regular “m”, but is a nasalized “m” pronounced with the palate lowered, so as to allow air to pass through the nose. Sāmsara is a common Western mispronunciation of samsāra.
3. Extending the “a” in loka is allowed for singing. But pronouncing it as lokā is incorrect.
4. The “ṇ” in trāṇāya is not the same as the regular “n”; it is a mūrdhanya, or retroflex, articulated with the tongue arched backward against the roof of the mouth. Traṇāya is also the wrong pronunciation.
5. The first vowel “a” is long, and the “ṇ” is a mūrdhanya, or retroflex (like “n” in “sand”).
6. Note the “ha”, or aspiration, and long second vowel “a” in ghanāghanatvam, which are both important in referring to the analogy of the guru as the dense raincloud that showers us with mercy.
7. It is important not to forget the “ār” in guṇārṇavasya, since pronouncing it as guṇānavasya loses the meaning of the ocean, or arṇava of mercy.
8. One should not pronounce this as guru, since this will alter the meaning to “I, the guru, offer obeisances.”
9. Śrī (Bengali) and śiri (Punjabi) are common mispronunciations.
10. Some devotees add an additional “r” and mispronounce this word as caraṇāravrindam. That destroys the meaning, which refers to lotus (aravinda) feet (caraṇa).

mahāprabhoh¹¹ kīrtana-nṛtya¹²-gīta¹³-
vāditra-mādyān¹⁴-manaso rasena
romāñca-kampāśru¹⁵-taraṅga-bhājo
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

11. According to sandhi, end with “oh” rather than “u”.
12. Many devotees wrongly sing “nitya” instead of “nṛtya”, which refers to the guru’s dancing.
13. Ending with a long “ā” is wrong.
14. Mādyān is a common mispronunciation.
15. The verse refers to the symptoms of ecstasy the guru feels when he dances and chants in kīrtana: (1) romāñca (hair standing on end), (2) kampa (quivering of the body), and (3) āśru-taraṅga (shedding waves of tears). This is why it is important to say or sing kampāśru-taraṅga, rather than kampāśu-taraṅga, which is a mispronunciation.

śrī-vigrahārādhana¹⁶-nitya-nānā-
 śṛṅgāra-tan-mandira-mārjanāḍau¹⁷
 yuktasya bhaktāmś ca¹⁸ niyuñjato 'pi
 vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

16. The word śrī-vigraha refers to the Deities and ārādhana refers to Their worship. To pronounce this correctly, it is best not to stop while pronouncing śrī-vigrahārādhana; pronouncing śrī-vigra and hārādhana as two separate words changes the meaning. Śrī-vigra harār dhana is another mispronunciation to avoid.
17. The word āḍau is important. It means “etcetera” and refers to the various temple services other than cleaning.
18. Bhaktān śaniyuñjato is a common mispronunciation. Śaṇideva is a demigod, and his name is not implied here. Bhaktān is pronounced correctly as bhaktāmś, since the ending is altered because of the next word ca. Bhaktāmś ca niyuñjato refers to the guru’s engaging his disciples in the Lord’s service in the temple.



catur-vidha¹⁹-śrī-bhagavat-prasāda²⁰-
 svādv-anna²¹-tr̥ptān²² hari-bhakta-saṅghān²³
 kṛtvaiva tr̥ptim bhajataḥ²⁴ sadaiva
 vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

19. There are no long vowels in catur and vidha; both have hrasva, or short vowels.
20. Prasādo is a common mispronunciation during the morning recitation of this song. Many devotees also mispronounce the “s” in prasāda as “ś”.
21. This refers to palatable (svādu) foodstuffs (anna). The words combine in sandhi to form svādv-anna. This should not be mispronounced as either svādvāna or svādana (which sounds like āsvādana, or “tasting”, but this is not what is implied here).
22. Sometimes devotees wrongly sing tr̥ptim here, but this word is to be sung only in the third line. Seeing the devotees satisfied (tr̥ptān), the spiritual master feels satisfaction (tr̥ptim).
23. The word is not saṅgān (singular, or association with one), but is saṅghān (plural, association with many).
24. Make sure to articulate the visarga, or ending “ḥ”.

śrī-rādhikā-mādhavayor apārā²⁵-
mādhurya-līlā guṇa-rūpa-nāmnām
prati-kṣaṇāśvādana²⁶-lolupasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

25. *Apāra-mādhurya-līlā* refers to the unlimited conjugal pastimes of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava. Pronouncing it *apārā* alters the meaning.

26. *Prati-kṣaṇa* (at every moment) and *āśvādana* (relishing) combine in *sandhi* to form *prati-kṣaṇāśvādana*, which should be pronounced together without a break in the middle. The word here is not *pratikṣā*, which refers to waiting.

nikuñja-yūno rati-keli-siddhyai²⁷
yā yālibhir²⁸ yuktir apekṣaṇīyā
tatrāti-dākṣyād²⁹ ati-vallabhasya³⁰
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

27. In a Western accent, some devotees mispronounce this as *radi-keli-sidyai*. The meaning of *rati-keli-siddhyai* is “perfection of conjugal loving pastimes.”

28. *Yayalibhi* and *yayālibhi* are common mispronunciations. *Yā yālibhir yuktir* refers to various (*yā yā*) arrangements (*yuktiḥ*) made by the *gopīs* (*ālibhiḥ*).

29. *Tatrādi-dakṣād* and *tatrādi-dākṣād* are common mispronunciations. The guru is very expert (*ati-dākṣyāt*) in the connection (*tatra*) of making various arrangements for the conjugal loving pastimes of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Mādhava.

30. Mispronouncing this as *ādi-vālabasya* loses the meaning of the guru's attribute of being very dear, or *ati-vallabha* (note the double “l” and “bh”).

sākṣād³¹-dharitvena³² samasta-śāstrair³³
uktas³⁴ tathā bhāvyata³⁵ eva sadbhiḥ
kintu prabhōr³⁶ yaḥ priya eva tasya
vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

31. Pronouncing this as *śākṣād* is wrong.

32. Sometimes devotees separate the ending “na” in *sākṣād-dharitvena* and sing it along with the next words: *sākṣād-dharitve na-samasta-śāstrair*. This reverses the meaning. The verse says that the guru is regarded as highly as the Supreme Lord, as is acknowledged by all the scriptures. However, *na-samasta-śāstrair* changes the meaning to “not all the scriptures.”

33. Pronouncing it as *śāstre* or *śastre* is a very common mistake.

34. Since the previous word ends with an “r”, *ruktas* is a common mispronunciation, which alters the meaning. *Uktas* means acknowledged (by all scriptures).

35. *Bhā vyatha* or *bhā yatha* are common mispronunciations. *Vyatha* (meaning “distress”) is definitely not implied here. Rather *bhāvyata* means “is considered.”

36. *Prabhur* is a common mispronunciation. *Prabhu* means “Lord,” and *prabhōḥ* means “to the Lord.”

yasya³⁷ prasādā³⁸ bhagavat-prasādo³⁹
 yasyāprasādān⁴⁰ na gatiḥ kuto⁴¹ 'pi
 dhyāyan⁴² stuvāms tasya yaśas⁴³ tri-sandhyam⁴⁴
 vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam

37. *Yasya* means “of whom (the guru).” If we mispronounce the first line as *yasyāprasādāt* *bhagavat-prasādo*, this reverses the meaning, and it becomes “by whose (the guru’s) dissatisfaction, Kṛṣṇa’s mercy is received.” So it is essential to correctly pronounce this.

38. *Prasādāt* is transformed into *prasādād*. The ending “t” is changed into “d” because it is followed by the consonant “bha” in the next word.

39. *Prasāda* is transformed into *prasādo* since the next word starts with the soft consonant (mṛdu vyañjana) “ya”.

40. If we mispronounce the second line as *yasya prasādān na gatiḥ kuto 'pi*, this reverses the meaning to: “by whose (the guru’s) mercy, no advancement is achieved.” Again, it is essential to correctly pronounce this. *Aprasādāt* here is pronounced *aprasādān*, because the next word starts with an “n”.

41. *Guto* is wrong; perhaps this is caused by the previous word starting with a “g”.

42. *Dhyāyan* (“meditating upon”) is often mispronounced *dhyāyām*.

43. This is not *yasya*, but is *yaśas* (“glory”).

44. This is not *tri-sandhyām*, but *tri-sandhyam* (“three junctures of the day: sunrise, noon, and sunset”).

5.3 Nāma-saṅkīrtana

hari harāye¹ namaḥ² kṛṣṇa yādavāya namaḥ³
 yādavāya mādhavāya keśavāya namaḥ

1. In this song by Śrīla Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura, articulating the second word as *harāye* or *harāya* is incorrect. *Harāye* is grammatically incorrect. *Harāya*, which means “unto Hara (Lord Śiva’s name),” is also incorrect because Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura is not calling upon Lord Śiva. He is addressing Lord Hari. *Hari harāye* means “unto Hari.” Hari’s name is recited contiguously in this song and many others, such as *hari hari viphalā janama gonāinu*.

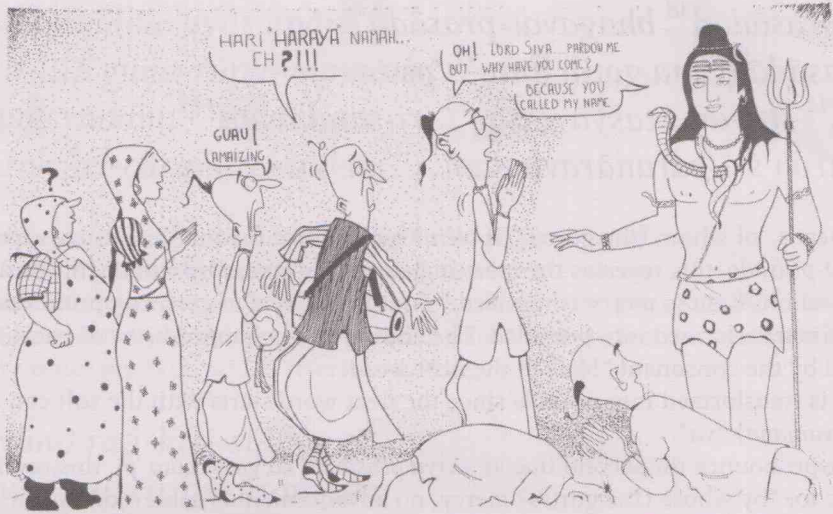
2. Not to be pronounced as *nāma*.

3. Not to be pronounced as *nāma ha*.

gopāla govinda rāma śrī-mādhūsūdanā⁴
 giridhārī gopīnātha madana-mohana⁵

4. *Mādhūsūdān* is a common mispronunciation.

5. *Madān-mohān* is also a common mispronunciation.



Devotees chanting “hari harāye” instead of “hari haraye” really call Lord Śiva.

5.4

Prema-Dhvani

jaya om viṣṇu pāda paramahaṁsa parivrājakācārya¹
 aṣṭottara-śata śrī-śrīmad² His Divine Grace A.C.
 Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda kī³ jaya!
 jaya om viṣṇu pāda paramahaṁsa parivrājakācārya
 aṣṭottara-śata Śrī-Śrīmad His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhānta
 Sarasvatī⁴ Gosvāmī⁵ Prabhupāda kī jaya
 ananta⁶-koṭi vaiṣṇava-vṛnda kī jaya!
 nāmācārya⁷ śrīla⁸ haridāsa ṭhākura⁹ kī jaya!
 premse kaho śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya¹⁰ prabhu nityānanda¹¹
 śrī advaita gadādhara¹² śrīvāsādi¹³ gaura-bhakta-vṛnda¹⁴ kī
 jaya!
 śrī-śrī-rādhā¹⁵-kṛṣṇa gopa-gopīnātha¹⁶ śyāma-kunḍa rādhā-
 kunḍa¹⁷ giri-govardhana¹⁸ kī jaya!
 vṛndāvana¹⁹-dhāma kī jaya, navadvīpa²⁰-dhāma kī jaya!
 gaṅgā²¹-māyī²² kī jaya, yamunā²³-māyī kī jaya, tulasi²⁴-devī
 kī jaya!
 samaveta²⁵ bhakta-vṛnda kī jaya!

“All glories to the assembled devotees!” (three times)
All glories to Śrī Guru and Śrī Gaurāṅga²⁶!
All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda!

1. *Parivrājākācārya* (sometimes mispronounced as *parivrājakācārya* or *parivrajakācārya*) is formed by the *sandhi* of *parivrājaka* (“wandering religious mendicant”) and *ācārya* (“spiritual teacher”).
2. *Śrīmad* (“resplendent”) has no emphasis on the last vowel. It is sometimes mispronounced *śrīmād*.
3. Note the long ending vowel.
4. *Sereswatty* or *seraswatty* are common mispronunciations. *Siddhānta Sarasvatī* was the title awarded to Bhaktisiddhānta Ṭhākura for his unparalleled erudition.
5. *Gasvāmī* is the wrong pronunciation. *Gosvāmī* means “master of the senses.”
6. *Ananti-koṭi* is a common mistake. *Ananta-koṭi* means infinite millions.
7. Not to be mispronounced as *nāmācārya*. The *sandhi* of *nāma* and *ācārya* forms *nāmācārya*, “the spiritual teacher of the holy names.”
8. Make sure to enunciate the long “ī”.
9. *Ṭhākura* (a title or way of addressing the highly esteemed) is often mispronounced as *takūr*.
10. “Caitanna” is common Bengali accented diction. It is recommended that devotees articulate Sanskrit words in Sanskrit pronunciation.
11. “Nītānanda” is also common Bengali accented diction. *Nityananda* and *Nityanānda* are also mispronunciations.
12. *Gadadār*, *Gādadār*, *Gādedār*, and *Gadhādhara* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Gadhādhara* (*gadā* means “mace” and *dhara* means “carrying”) is a name of Lord Viṣṇu, the carrier of the mace. Do not pronounce it *Gadhādhara*, because *gadā* means “donkey.”
13. “Śrīboś” is common Bengali diction. *Śrīvāsa* (*Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura*) and *ādi* (“others”) combine to form *śrīvāsādi*.
14. Note that the ending vowel in *vr̥nda* (meaning “group”) is short.
15. Make sure to articulate the long ending vowel “ā”. “Rādhā” means “the best worshiper.”
16. Some devotees say *gopa-gopikā* instead of *gopa-gopīnātha*. They claim that Kṛṣṇa’s name has already occurred, and they replace it with *gopikā* to include the *gopīs* in the *prema-dhvanī*. (This is not so important, since it is not a pronunciation issue).
17. Many devotees over-accentuate the “u” in *kuṇḍa* and forget to articulate the “a” at the end.
18. *Go* (here it means “cows”) and *vardhana* (“nourishing”) combine to form *Govardhana*, a mountain that nourishes cows. The meaning is missed by mispronouncing it “Govardān.”
19. *Vṛndāvana* (the forest of Śrī Vṛndā-devī) is mispronounced as *Vṛndavān* and *Vṛndavana*.
20. *Navadvīpa* (“the nine islands”) is sometimes mispronounced as *Nāvadvīpa*.
21. *Gaṅgā* is misarticulated as *Gāṅga* in Western accents.
22. *Māyī* and *mayyā*: either can be chanted, as both mean “mother.”
23. *Yamunā* is misarticulated as *Yamūna* in Western accents.
24. *Ṭalsi*, *tulsi*, and *tulāsi* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Tulasī* means “incomparably the best.”
25. The word is not *sāma-veda*, but *samaveta*, or “assembled.”
26. *Gaura* (golden) and *aṅga* (limbs) combine to form *Gaurāṅga* (note the long vowel). *Gaurāṅga* is therefore a mispronunciation.

namas te¹ nārasimhāya²
 prahlādāhlāda-dāyine³
 hiraṇyakaśīpor⁴ vakṣaḥ⁵-
 śilā-ṭaṅka-nakhālaye⁶

1. Nāmaste and namāste are both wrong. Namaste alone is correct.
2. Nṛsimhāya does not match the meter. Common mispronunciations to be avoided are “Narashinga” and “Nishringa.”
3. Pralādalāda dāyāne is a common Western mispronunciation. The actual words are prahlāda (to Prahlāda Mahārāja) + āhlāda (of joy) + dāyine (the giver), which combine to form prahlādāhlāda-dāyine, i.e., “the giver of joy to Prahlāda Mahārāja.”
4. Hiraṇyakāśīpur is wrong, as we are not referring to the city (pur) of Kāśī.



Nṛsiṃhadeva wonders about being called “Nara Shinga.”

5. Vakṣa ha is wrong. The ending “h” is resounded with an echo of the previous vowel. Vakṣaḥ means “chest.”
6. Śrila-ṭaṅkā-nakhālaye is a common mispronunciation. The correct words are śilā (on the stonelike) + ṭaṅka (chisels) + nakha-ālaye (whose nails) = śilā-ṭaṅka-nakhālaye, i.e., “whose nails are like chisels on the stonelike [chest of Hiraṇyakāśipu].”

ito nṛsimhaḥ parato nṛsimho
 yato yato yāmi tato⁷ nṛsimhaḥ

bahir *nṛsimho* *hṛdaye*⁸ *nṛsimho*⁹
*nṛsimham*¹⁰ *ādim*¹¹ *śaraṇam* *prapadye*¹²

7. *Yāto yāto yāmi tāto* is a common mispronunciation.
8. *Baher* and *hṛdayer* are both wrong. *Bahir* (meaning “externally”) and *hṛdaye* (meaning “in the heart”) are correct.
9. The most common mistake in this verse is to mix up the endings of *nṛsimho* and *nṛsimhaḥ*. Here is a mnemonic for the correct order:
a, o, a, o, o – *nṛsimhaḥ*, *nṛsimho*, *nṛsimhaḥ*, *nṛsimho*, *nṛsimho*. *Nṛsimhaḥ* changes to *nṛsimho* when the next word starts with a soft letter.
10. *Nṛsimham* should not be sung as *narasimham*, as that will alter the meter. *Nṛsimha* is mispronounced in many ways: *Nṛśinga*, *Naśinga*, *Nṛsimma*, *Nṛsimba*, etc.
11. *Adim* is incorrect. The phrase *ādim śaraṇam* describes Lord *Nṛsimha* as “the origin of all things and the supreme refuge.”
12. *Prapade* is incorrect. Correct is *prapadye* (meaning “I surrender”).

*tava kara-kamala-vare nakham*¹³ *adbhuta-śṛṅgam*¹⁴
*dalita*¹⁵ *hiranyaśipu-tanu-bhṛṅgam*¹⁶
keśava dhṛta-narahari-rūpa jaya jagadīśa hare

13. *Nakhām* is wrong. *Nakham* means “the nails.”
14. *Śṛṅgām* is wrong. *Adbhuta-śṛṅgam* means “wonderfully sharp tips.”
15. *Dālītā* is wrong. *Dalita* means “ripped apart.”
16. *Bhṛṅgām* is wrong. *Bhṛṅgam* means “wasp.”

5.6 Śrī Tulasī Praṇāma

*vṛndāyai*¹ *tulasī*² *-devyai*³
*priyāyai*⁴ *keśavasya ca*
*viṣṇu*⁵ *-bhakti-prade*⁶ *devī*
*satyavatyai*⁷ *namo namaḥ*

1. *Vṛndāyai* (meaning “unto *Vṛndā*”) is commonly misarticulated as *vṛndāy* or *vṛnday*.
2. *Ṭalsi*, *tulsi*, and *tulasī* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Tulasī* means “incomparably the best.”
3. *Devay* and *devāy* are mispronunciations of *devyai*, which means “unto the goddess.”
4. *Priyāyai* (meaning “unto she who is dear”) is often mispronounced as *priyay* or *priyāy*.
5. The original verse mentions *Viṣṇu*.
6. *Prade* means “who bestows,” and it should not be pronounced *prati* or *pradi*.
7. *Satyavatāy* is a major distortion of the word *satyavatyai*, which means “unto *Satyavatī*,” another name of *Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī*.

*namo namaḥ¹ tulasī² kṛṣṇa-preyaśi³ namo namaḥ⁴
rādhā-kṛṣṇa-sevā pābo⁵ ei abhilāśi⁶*

1. *Namo namo* is a common mispronunciation. Here *namaḥ namaḥ* is pronounced as *namo namaḥ*. Only the first *namaḥ* is pronounced as *namo*, since the next word after it starts with “n”, which is a *komala*, or soft letter. The second *namaḥ* remains as it is since the word following it starts with “t”, a *kaṭhōra*, or hard letter.
2. *Ṭalsi*, *tulsi*, and *tulāsi* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Tulasī* means “incomparably the best.”
3. Note that the “a” vowel is not long in *kṛṣṇa-preyaśi*, which means “O beloved of Kṛṣṇa!”
4. See the note in No. 1.
5. *Pāvo* is pronounced *pābo*, because this is a Bengali song; the word means “I will obtain.”
6. *Abhilāśi* and *abilāśi* are both incorrect. *Abhilāśi* means “I am desirous.” Note that in the word *abhilāśi*, the sibilant “ś” is different than the sibilant “s” in *tulasī*.

*ye⁷ tomāra śaraṇa loy, tāra⁸ vāñchā⁹ pūrṇa hoy
kṛpā¹⁰ kori' koro tāre vṛndāvana¹¹-vāsi*

7. *Ye* is pronounced *je* by Bengalis.
8. Note that only the first vowel is long in *tāra*, which means “his or her.”
9. Make sure to pronounce both vowels long in *vāñchā*, which means “desire(s).”
10. First, note the long ending vowel in *kṛpā*, which means “mercy.” Second, note that the retroflex “ṛ” in *kṛpā* is the same as that in Kṛṣṇa. *Kreepa* is a Western-accented mispronunciation.
11. *Vṛndāvana* (the forest of Śrī Vṛndā-devī) is mispronounced as *Vṛndavān* and *Vṛndavana*.

*mora ei abhilāśa¹², vilāsa kuñje¹³ dio vāsa
nayane heribo¹⁴ sadā¹⁵ yugala-rūpa-rāśi¹⁶*

12. *Abhilāsa* and *abilāsa* are incorrect. *Abhilāśa* means “desire.”
13. The ending is not *kuñja*, it is *kuñje*. The locative ending “e” signifies “in.” *Vilāsa kuñje* means “in the pleasure groves.”
14. *Haribo* is a commonly misarticulated word in this song. *Nayane heribo* means “I will behold with my eyes.” Make sure to enunciate the ending “e” in *nayane*, which is in the locative case.
15. Note the long ending vowel “ā” in *sadā*, which means “always.”
16. It is not *rāsi*. *Yugala-rūpa-rāśi* means “the waves of the Divine Couple’s beauty.”

*ei nivedana¹⁷ dharo¹⁸, sakhīra¹⁹ anugata²⁰ koro
sevā-adhikāra²¹ diye koro nija dāśi*

17. *Nive dhana* changes the meaning. We are not mentioning money (*dhana*) here. Another mispronunciation to avoid is *nivedena*. *Nivedana* means “request.”
18. *Daro* is wrong. *Dharo* means “please keep or please accept.”
19. *Sakhir* is the wrong pronunciation. *Sakhīra* means “of one of the cowherd damsels.”
20. *Anugato* is a common mispronunciation. *Anugata koro* means “make me a follower.”
21. *Jodhikāro* and *yodhikāro* are both wrong; these mispronunciations may be due to imitating the Bengali diction. *Sevā-adhikāra* means “the privilege of devotional service.”

*ḍīna*²² *kṛṣṇa-dāse koy*²³, *ei yena mora hoy*
*śrī-rādhā-govinda-preme sadā*²⁴ *yena bhāsi*²⁵

22. Note the long “ī” vowel in *ḍīna* (meaning “fallen and lowly”).
23. *Koy* or *kohe* means “says” (in this regard, it means “prays”).
24. Note the long ending vowel “ā” in *sadā* (meaning “always”).
25. *Vāsi* or *bāsi* (meaning “resident”) are incorrect articulations and change the meaning. The word is *bhāsi* (meaning “swimming”).



5.8 Śrī Tulasī Pradakṣiṇa-mantra

*yāni kāni ca pāpāni*¹
*brahma-hatyādikāni*² *ca*
*tāni tāni praṇāśyanti*³
*pradakṣiṇaḥ*⁴ *pade pade*

1. Many devotees commonly say *pa pāni*, though here we are not referring to water (*pāni*) but to sins (*pāpāni*). Avoid “*cāpā pāni*.”
2. *Brāmatyādikāni* is incorrect enunciation due to Western diction. This phrase refers to the sin of *brahma-hatyā* (killing a *brāhmaṇa*) and *ādikāni* (so on). With the rule of *sandhi*, *brahma-hatyā* combined with *ādikāni* becomes *brahma-hatyādikāni*.
3. *Praṇa sānti* (“peace”) is not implied here. *Praṇāśyanti* means “completely destroyed”.
4. *Pradakṣiṇa*, *pradākṣiṇ*, and *prādakṣiṇ* are all mispronunciations. Also, uttering this word as *pradākṣiṇā* makes it the feminine gender, which does not make sense. *Pradakṣiṇaḥ* means “[by] the circumambulation [of Tulasī Devī].”

vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca¹ kṛpā-sindhubyā² eva ca
patitānām pāvanebhyo³ vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ

1. The most glaring mistake devotees make is mispronouncing the first word as *vanca*, *vāncā*, and *vancā*. The next phrase *kalpatarubhyaś ca* is often mispronounced as *kālpatarubhyaś ca*, *kalpātarubhyaś ca*, *kalpaṭarubhyaś ca*, *kalpatarubhyāśca*, and *kalpatarubhayaśca*. *Vāñchā-kalpa-tarubhyaḥ* means “who are desire trees.” According to the principles of Sanskrit *sandhi*, since the next word is *ca*, the ending changes from *tarubhyaḥ* to *tarubhyaś*.
2. Note the long ending vowel “ā” in *kṛpā*, which means “mercy.” *Kreepa* is a common Western-accented mispronunciation. The next word *sindhubyā* (“who are oceans of”) is mispronounced *sindubya*.
3. Western devotees often misarticulate the vowels in this phrase as *paṭeetanām* and *paṭeetanām*. The next word is also wrongly enunciated: *pavanebhyo* and *pavānebhyo*. *Patitānām pāvanebhyo* means “who are the purifiers of the fallen souls.”

(jaya)¹ śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya² prabhu nityānanda³
śrī advaita gadādhara⁴ śrīvāsādi⁵ gaura-bhakta-vṛnda⁶

1. Śrīla Prabhupāda has recommended that devotees do not start this mantra with *bhaja*.
2. “Caitanna” is common Bengali accented diction. It is recommended that devotees articulate Sanskrit words in Sanskrit pronunciation.
3. “Nītānanda” is also common Bengali accented diction. *Nityananda* and *Nityanānda* are also mispronunciations.
4. *Gadadār*, *Gādādār*, *Gādedār*, and *Gadhādhara* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Gadādhara* (*gadā* means “mace” and *dhara* means “carrying”) is a name of Lord Viṣṇu, the carrier of the mace. Do not pronounce it *Gadhādhara*, because *gadhā* means “donkey.”
5. “Śrīboś” is common Bengali diction. *Śrīvāsa* (*Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura*) and *ādi* (“others”) combine to form *śrīvāsādi*.
6. Note that the ending vowel in the word *vṛnda* (“group”) is not long, as it is in *vṛndā*, a name for Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī.



5.11 Hare Kṛṣṇa Mahā-mantra

hare¹ kṛṣṇa² hare kṛṣṇa³ kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma⁴ hare rāma rāma rāma⁵ hare hare

1. Hari, hāre, hade, and hale are common mispronunciations. Śrīla Prabhupāda instructs us in his purport to the *mahā-mantra*: “Harā is the supreme pleasure energy of the Lord, changed to Hare in the vocative.” The ending vowel “e” in each of the eight occurrences of Hare (Har + e) is a long vowel, which should be pronounced for two *mātrās*, or time units.
2. Some argue about whether “Krushna” or “Krishna” is the correct pronunciation, but both are wrong. Note that the *ṛ*, *ṣ*, and *ṇ* in Kṛṣṇa are not the same as the regular *r*, *s*, and *n*, but are all in the *mūrdhanya*, or retroflex, category, and are articulated with the tongue arched backward against the roof of the mouth. The devotee should make a special effort (*prayatna*) to conscientiously articulate the Lord’s name. Krishan, Krishina, Kishan, and Kishna are all deviations (*apabhramṣa*) from the Lord’s original name. Still, the deviations maintain the same meaning (*artha*) as the original word (*sādhū-śabda*), because they remind us of the original.
3. If a devotee holds the ending vowel “a” for twice as long as usual, then the name changes from Kṛṣṇa to Kṛṣṇā (another name of Draupadī). The original name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is Kṛṣṇa, which describes His all-attractiveness.
4. Rām, Rāmā, Rāmo, and Rama are all mispronunciations. The correct name, Rāma, refers to the Lord as the Supreme Enjoyer.
5. All sixteen names in the *mahā-mantra* are in the vocative case. If the ending vowel “a” is omitted in Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, then the vocative sense is lost, and the chanting is no longer an address or “calling out” to the Lord. The ending “ma” in rāma is an *oṣṭhya*, or labial consonant, which requires closing the lips to pronounce. This is the only time in the entire *mahā-mantra* that the lips are used.

Powerful effects can be derived from properly articulating the *mahā-mantra*. In the *mahā-mantra*, each of the sixteen names of the Lord has a *mūrdhanya*, or retroflex, sound, which is articulated with the tongue arched backward against the roof of the mouth:

- In Hare: the consonant “r”.
- In Kṛṣṇa: the vowel “ṛ” and the consonants “ṣ” and “ṇ”.
- In Rāma: the consonant “ṛ”.

Mūrdhni means the “head” or “cerebrum,” and *mūrdhanya* means “of or toward the head.” The *mūrdhanya*, or palate, is in line with the *brahma-randhra*, the soft spot on the very top of the head, from which elevated *yogīs* leave their bodies to travel toward higher planets. Thus by repeatedly striking the *mūrdhanya* while chanting the *mahā-mantra*, the devotees can start their upward path back to Godhead. At a *Bhagavad-gītā* lecture in Hyderabad (on November 30, 1972), a man asked “how to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, and how to have a permanent state of awakened *kuṇḍalinī*.” Prabhupāda replied, “Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. That’s all.” From this we can understand that chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa encompasses every spiritual process.

Oṃkāra (*aum*) starts from the *kaṇṭha* (throat), resounds on the *mūrdhanya* (palate), and ends with the *oṣṭhya* (lips) closed. Similarly, *hare kṛṣṇa* and *hare rāma* both begin with

5.9 Śrī Vaiṣṇava Praṇāma

vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca¹ kṛpā-sindhubhya² eva ca
patitānām pāvanebhyo³ vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ

1. The most glaring mistake devotees make is mispronouncing the first word as *vanca*, *vāncā*, and *vancā*. The next phrase *kalpatarubhyaś ca* is often mispronounced as *kālpatarubhyaś ca*, *kalpātarubhyaś ca*, *kalpaṭarubhyaś ca*, *kalpatarubhyāśca*, and *kalpatarubhayaśca*. *Vāñchā-kalpa-tarubhyaḥ* means “who are desire trees.” According to the principles of Sanskrit *sandhi*, since the next word is *ca*, the ending changes from *tarubhyaḥ* to *tarubhyaś*.
2. Note the long ending vowel “ā” in *kṛpā*, which means “mercy.” *Kreepa* is a common Western-accented mispronunciation. The next word *sindhubhya* (“who are oceans of”) is mispronounced *sindubhya*.
3. Western devotees often misarticulate the vowels in this phrase as *paṭeetanām* and *paṭeetanām*. The next word is also wrongly enunciated: *pavanebyo* and *pavānebyo*. *Patitānām pāvanebhyo* means “who are the purifiers of the fallen souls.”

5.10 Pañca-tattva Mahā-mantra

(jaya)¹ śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya² prabhu nityānanda³
śrī advaita gadādhara⁴ śrīvāsādi⁵ gaura-bhakta-vṛnda⁶

1. Śrīla Prabhupāda has recommended that devotees do not start this mantra with *bhaja*.
2. “Caitāna” is common Bengali accented diction. It is recommended that devotees articulate Sanskrit words in Sanskrit pronunciation.
3. “Nītānanda” is also common Bengali accented diction. Nityananda and Nityanānda are also mispronunciations.
4. Gadadār, Gādadār, Gādedār, and *Gadhādhara* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Gadādhara* (*gadā* means “mace” and *dhara* means “carrying”) is a name of Lord Viṣṇu, the carrier of the mace. Do not pronounce it *Gadhādhara*, because *gadhā* means “donkey.”
5. “Śrīboś” is common Bengali diction. Śrīvāsa (Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura) and *ādi* (“others”) combine to form *śrīvāsādi*.
6. Note that the ending vowel in the word *vṛnda* (“group”) is not long, as it is in *vṛndā*, a name for Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī.



“ha” in the throat, resonate “ka” and “ra” at the palate, and end with “ṇ” at the *dantya* (teeth) or “m” with closed lips.

Sanskrit is a precise language, which needs to be very attentively articulated; otherwise, a mispronounced word can change the meaning and the result of a mantra. So the devotees should avoid sleepiness and laziness when chanting *japa*. By clear and attentive pronunciation, we can follow Śrīla Prabhupāda’s instruction that the upper lip, lower lip, and tongue should all be engaged in chanting.

“... chanting involves the activity of the upper and lower lips as well as the tongue. All three must be engaged in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. The words Hare Kṛṣṇa should be very distinctly pronounced and heard. Sometimes one mechanically produces a hissing sound instead of chanting with the proper pronunciation, with the help of the lips and the tongue. Chanting is very simple, but one must practice it very seriously.”

Cc. Ādi 17.32, purport

The vibration of one string on a musical instrument causes the resonance of an adjacent string. Similarly, by vibrating the tongue, throat, and body to correctly pronouncing the holy names, devotees should find their souls resonating.

5.12 Śṛṅgāra-ārati (Greeting the Deities)

veṇūṁ¹ kvaṇantam² aravinda-dalāyatākṣam³
barhāvataṁsam asitāmbuda⁴-sundarāṅgam
kandarpa-koṭi-kamanīya-viśeṣa-śobham⁵
govindam⁶ ādi-puruṣam⁷ tam aham⁸ bhajāmi

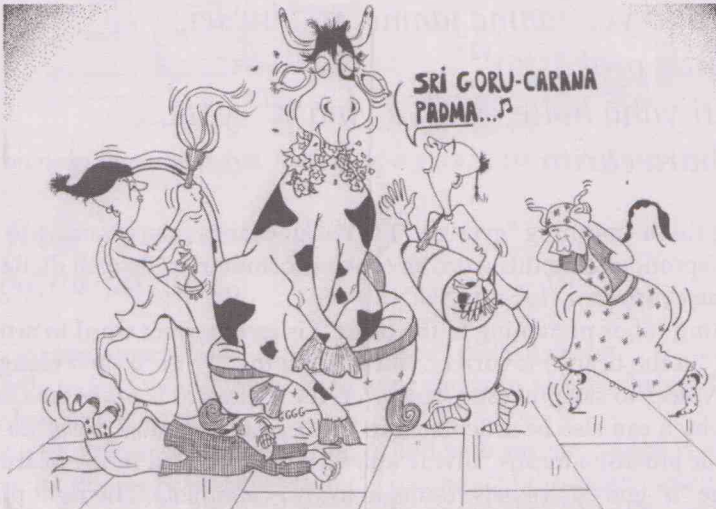
1. Venūm is a common mispronunciation. The actual word is veṇūṁ, which means “flute.”
2. Kanvantam and kvanvantam are what many devotees sing. The correct pronunciation is kvaṇantam (“playing”).
3. Devotees mispronounce this phrase as aravīn dādalāyatākṣam. The original phrase aravinda-dalāyatākṣam is formed with the words aravinda-dala (“like lotus petals”) + āyata (“blooming”) + akṣam (“whose eyes”).
4. Also, it is common to separate the words in the wrong places and mispronounce this phrase as barhāvataṁ samāsītāmbuda. The correct phrase, barhāvataṁsam asitāmbuda, is formed with these words: barha (“a peacock feather”) + avataṁsam (“whose ornament on the head”) + asita-ambuda (“tinged with the hue of blue clouds”).
5. Excessive enunciation of the ending vowels and omission of the ending anusvāra, “ṁ”, in this phrase changes it to viśeṣā-śobhā. The proper phrase is viśeṣa-śobham, comprised of viśeṣa (“unique”) + śobham (“loveliness”).
6. Govindam (“Lord Govinda, the lover of cows”) is commonly misarticulated as govindām.
7. In the phrase ādi-puruṣam (“the original person”), puruṣam is sometimes wrongly enunciated as pūruṣam, purūṣam, and puruṣām.
8. Tamahām is another mispronunciation. The correct phrase is tam (“Him”) + aham (“I”).

aṅgāni yasya sakalendriya⁹-vṛtti-manti¹⁰
paśyanti pānti kalayanti ciraṁ jaganti¹¹
ānanda-cinmaya-sad-ujjvala-vigrahasya¹²
govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi

9. *Sakalendriya* is comprised of *sakala* (“all”) and *indriya* (“organs or senses”). Many times while singing the Govindam prayers, devotees separate this word into *sakalen driya*.
10. *Vṛti-mānti* is the incorrect enunciation of *vṛtti-manti* (note the double “t”), which means “possessing the functions.”
11. The vowels in this line are wrongly stressed and mispronounced as *paśyān tipān tikālayānti cirām jagānti*. The original phrase is *paśyanti* (“see”) + *pānti* (“maintain”) + *kalayanti* (“manifest”) + *ciraṁ* (“eternally”) + *jaganti* (“the universes”).
12. The third line is also mispronounced as *ānandā cinmayā sadū jvālā vigrahasya*. *Jvālā* (“flame”) is not implied here; rather, this phrase describes the Lord’s transcendently splendid form comprised of eternity, knowledge, and bliss: *ānanda* (“bliss”) + *cit* (“truth”) + *maya* (“full of”) + *sat* (“substantiality”) + *ujjvala* (“full of dazzling splendor”) + *vigrahasya* (“whose form”).

5.13 Śrī Guru-vandanā

śrī-guru-caraṇa-padma¹, kevala-bhakati-sadma,
vando mui² sāvadhāna mate³
yāhāra prasāde bhāi, e bhava toriyā yāi⁴,
kṛṣṇa-prāpti hoy yāhā ha'te⁵



Since the disciples are mispronouncing “guru,” a cow is accepting the worship.

1. Many devotees overstress the first “u” in *guru* when singing. Also, devotees should avoid enunciating *guru* as *goru* or *garu* (meaning “cow”). Make sure to enunciate the retroflex “ṇ” in *carāṇa-padma*, which means “lotus feet.”
2. This is not *muni*. *Vando mui* means “I bow down.” Bengali diction changes the *vando* to *bando*.
3. *Sarvadana mâte* or *sarvadhana mâte* are mispronunciations. *Sarvadhana* means “all wealth,” and *mâte* means “O mother,” neither of which is implied here. The word *sāvadhāna* means “attentive” and *mate* means “intelligence.”
4. *Toriyā yāi* means “crossing over.” Avoid over-accenting the “i”, and remember to sound the long ending vowel “ā” in *toriyā*.
5. *Ha’te* and *hoite* are the same word. *Yāhā haite* means “by which.”

*guru-mukha-padma-vākya*⁶, *cittete koriyā*⁷ *aikya*,
*ār*⁸ *nā koriho māne*⁹ *āśā*
*śrī-guru-carāṇe rati, ei se uttama-gati*¹⁰,
ye prasāde pūre sarva āśā

6. Avoid elongating the ending “a” vowel; otherwise, it sounds incorrect: *guru-mukhā-padma-vakyā*. The correct phrase is comprised of *guru-mukha-padma* (“the lotus mouth of the spiritual master”) + *vākya* (“the words emanating from”).
7. *Koriho* is not the correct word here. The correct word is *koriyā*, which means “making or doing.”
8. Many devotees sing *ārā nā*, but that is not implied here. The correct word, *ār*, means “other or anything else”.
9. *Māne* is another misarticulated word in the song. The actual phrase is *koriho māne*, meaning “consider in the mind.”
10. *Uṭamā-gaṭi* is another common mispronunciation. The correct phrase *uttama-gati* (with a double “t” in the first word) means “the highest perfection or ultimate goal.”

*caḥṣu*¹¹ *-dān dilo yei, janme janme prabhu sei*,
*divya jñān hṛde prakāśito*¹²
*prema-bhakti yāhā hoite, avidyā vināśa*¹³ *yāte*,
vede gāy yāhāra carito

11. Pronouncing *caḥṣu* (meaning “eyesight”) as *cakku* changes the meaning to “knife” (at least in Hindi). Mispronouncing this word as *cakhu* is common in Bengali diction, which transforms the consonant “ḥṣ” into “kh”.
12. *Hṛdoy* (meaning “of or pertaining to the heart”) is an incorrect word to articulate here; rather, *hṛde* (“in the heart”) is correct. Minimizing the “ā” to “a” and elongating the “i” to “ī” causes devotees to say *prakaśito*. However, the real word is *prakāśito* (meaning “is revealed”), which can also be articulated in the Bengali accent as *prokāśito*. The phrase *divya jñān hṛde prakāśito* means “divine knowledge is revealed in the heart.”
13. Confusing the “a” and “ā” vowels results in *āvidyā vināśa jāte*. The right phrase is *avidyā* (“ignorance”) + *vināśa yāte* (“is destroyed”).

śrī-guru karuṇā-sindhu¹⁴, adhama janāra bandhu¹⁵,
 lokanātha lokera jivana¹⁶
 hā hā prabhu¹⁷ koro doya¹⁸, deho more pada-chāyā¹⁹,
 ebe yaśa²⁰ ghuṣuk tribhuvana²¹

14. Śrī-garu karūna-sinḍu is commonly misarticulated. Devotees should avoid enunciating guru as goru and garu (meaning “cow”). Also, note the retroflex “ṇ” and the long ending vowel “ā” in karuṇā (“mercy”). The “dh” rather than a “ḍ” should be sung in sindhu (“ocean”), and use a short “i” rather than a long “ī”.
15. Ādamā janāra bandu is the second mispronounced phrase in the first line. The proper words are adhama janāra (“of the fallen souls”) + bandhu (“the friend”).
16. Pronouncing this as loke nāth loke rājiv ānā changes the meaning. We are not calling (ānā) Rājiv. Here is the word-for-word: lokanātha (“spiritual master of the entire world”) + lokera jivana (“the life of all people”). Note the long “ī” and the short “a” vowels in jivana.
17. Prābu is the wrong enunciation. Prabhu means “O master.”
18. Note the long ending vowel “ā” in koro doya (“please be merciful”).
19. This is not chaya or choya (which in Bengali mean “six”), but is chāyā, meaning “shade.”
20. Avoid enunciating this as jāś or josh. Yaśa means “fame.”
21. Not ṭribuvana or treebuvana. Tribhuvana = tri (“three”) + bhuvana (“worlds”).



By mispronouncing pada-chāyā, instead of a guru, a six-footed alien is “worshipped”.

dui pade²² loila²³ śaraṇa
 gurudeva-patita-pāvana²⁴

22. Pāda is incorrect grammar here. Dui pade means “at his two feet.”
23. Changing loila to loilo would imply our asking the guru to take shelter. But loila śaraṇa means “we have taken shelter.”
24. In rhyming with the previous line, devotees end with pavana, which is incorrect enunciation. Patita-pāvana means “savior” (pāvana) “of the fallen” (patita).

Note: This last verse is a later addition to the song originally sung in ISKCON.

5.14 Jaya Rādhā-Mādhava

rādhā-mādhava¹ kuñja-bihārī²
gopi-jana-vallabha³ giri-vara-dhārī⁴
yaśodā-nandana⁵ vraja-jana-rañjana⁶
yāmuna-tīra-vana-cārī⁷

1. In flowing to or matching the rhythm with the next word, which is *mādhava*, some devotees mispronounce *rādhā* as *rādha*.
2. Kuñjābi hārī is not implied here, though this is what many devotees sing. The actual phrase is *kuñja* (groves) + *bihārī* (enjoyer) = *kuñja-bihārī*, or “He who enjoys loving pastimes in the groves of Vṛndāvana.”
3. *Gopi-jana-wolaba* is a common misarticulation. Note the long ending “ī” vowel in *gopī-jana* (meaning “cowherd maidens”). Note the double “ll” and the “bh” consonant in *vallabha* (meaning “dear”).
4. The ending word is not *dhārī*, as pronounced with a Western accent. Here the proper words are: *giri-vara* (“Govardhana, the best of hills”) + *dhārī* (“the holder of”).
5. The Western-accented enunciation of “d” as “ḍ” causes the mispronunciation *yaśodā-nandana*. This also omits the “ā” at the end of *yaśodā* (meaning “the giver of fame, the mother of Kṛṣṇa”). *Nandana* means “son, or one who gives pleasure.” So Lord Kṛṣṇa is *yaśodā-nandana*, the beloved son of mother Yaśodā.
6. In Bengali diction, this is pronounced *braja* (“Vṛndāvana” or “Vraja”) + *jana* (“inhabitants”) + *rañjana* (“delighter of”).
7. Yamna, Jamna, Yamūna, and Jamūna are all mispronunciations. The actual name of the river goddess is Yamunā. However, when we are describing the banks (*tīra*) of the Yamunā River, then the word in Sanskrit becomes *yāmuna-tīra*, since the possessive form of *yamunā* is *yāmuna*. *Tīra* is often misarticulated as *tīrā*, even though there is only a short vowel at the end. The Lord is wandering in the forests along the banks of the river Yamunā; *vana* (“forest”) + *cārī* (“wanderer”).

Note: This is a song from Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s *Gīti-saṁgrha*.

5.15 Invocation

om namo bhagavate¹ vāsudevāya²

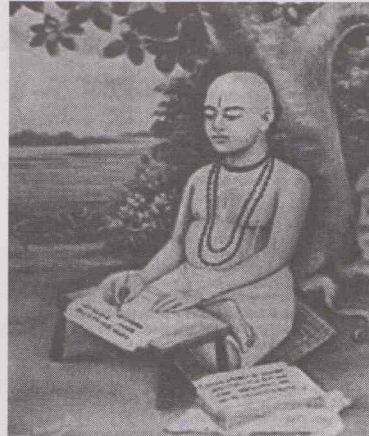
1. *Bagavate*, *bāgavate*, and *bhāgavate* are all incorrect. Make sure to enunciate the consonant “bh” in the beginning and the first vowel as a short “a”; *bhagavate* means “unto the Personality of Godhead.”
2. *Vasudevāya* would be wrong, since here we are not referring to Vasudeva, the father of Kṛṣṇa. Here we are bowing to Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa), the son of Vasudeva.

om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-śalākayā¹
cakṣur unmīlitam² yena tasmai³ śrī-gurave⁴ namah

1. Jananjana and janānjana are both improper articulations. The consonant “jña” is pronounced “gnya.” Also remember that jñāna and āñjana combine in sandhi to form jñānāñjana (note that the first two vowels are both long). Jñāna means “knowledge,” āñjana means “ointment,” and śalākayā means “by a medical instrument called a śalākā, which is used to apply medical ointment to eyes afflicted with cataracts.” Make sure to pronounce the second and fourth vowels of śalākayā long.
2. Mispronouncing this phrase as cākṣur anamīlitam obscures the meaning. Cakṣuḥ, meaning “eyes,” becomes cakṣur (the ending is changed to “r” since the next word starts with a vowel). Unmīlitam (note the long “ī”) means “were opened.”
3. Tāzmaye is a common Western misarticulation of the word tasmai, meaning “unto him.”
4. Avoid saying or singing the mispronunciation garave.

śrī-caitanya-mano-bhīṣṭam¹ sthāpitam² yena bhū-tale³
svāyam⁴ rūpaḥ kadā mahyam⁵ dadāti sva-padāntikam

1. Bistam, bīstam, bhistam, bhīstam, biṣṭam, and bīṣṭam are all incorrect. Make sure to pronounce the “bh” consonant, the long vowel “ī”, and the “ṣṭ” conjunctive in ‘bhīṣṭam, which is the abbreviated form of abhīṣṭam, meaning “what is desired.” It is abbreviated for the sake of the śloka meter.
2. Be sure to pronounce the first vowel long and the last vowel short in sthāpitam, meaning “established.”
3. The vowel is long in bhū (meaning “this planet earth”), and the “t” in tale (meaning “the surface of”) is not “ṭ” as it is commonly enunciated with a Western accent.
4. Two mispronunciations are svāyam and so ‘yam (so is derived from saḥ, which means “he” or “she”, and ‘yam is the abbreviated form of ayam, which means “this”). Svāyam means “personally himself.”
5. Mayam and mayyam are both wrong. Mahyam means “unto me.”



vande 'ham śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalaṁ śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavāṁś¹ ca
 śrī-rūpaṁ sāgrajātaṁ saha-gaṇa-raghunāthānvitāṁ taṁ sa jīvaṁ
 sādvaītaṁ sāvadhūtaṁ² parijana-sahitaṁ kṛṣṇa-caitanya-devaṁ
 śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-pādān saha-gaṇa-lalitā-śrī-viśākhānvitāṁś³ ca

1. Here śrī-guroḥ refers to one's main initiating or instructing spiritual master (singular). Avoid pronouncing this as śrī-guru, which alters the meaning to "I, the guru, offer obeisances". And śrī-gurūn (avoid the common mispronunciation śrī-gurum) refers to all the spiritual masters (plural) in the paramparā. Vaiṣṇavān (meaning "unto all the Vaiṣṇavas") becomes vaiṣṇavāṁś (note the long vowel "ā"), because the next word starts with "c".
2. Sa ("with") + agra-jātaṁ ("elder brother") combine to form sāgrajātaṁ, which means "with his elder brother." The agra-ja, or elder brother, of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī is Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī. Make sure to articulate the long vowels "ā" in saha-gaṇa-raghunāthānvitāṁ, meaning "with Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī and his associates." Also, do not forget to enunciate the long "ā" vowels in sādvaītaṁ (meaning "with Advaita Ācārya") and sāvadhūtaṁ (meaning "with Nityānanda Prabhu").
3. Pādān is a common mistake; pādān is the correct form; it refers to the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Lalitā-śrī-viśākhā-anvitān ca (meaning "accompanied by Lalitā and Śrī Viśākhā") becomes, according to sandhi and ending rules, lalitā-śrī-viśākhānvitāṁś ca (note the long "ā" vowels).

mahāprasāde govinde
 nāma-brahmaṇi¹ vaiṣṇave
 svalpa-puṇyavatāṁ² rājan
 viśvāso naiva jāyate

1. Namō-brāhmaṇe and nāmni-brāhmaṇi are mispronunciations, which are caused by the misunderstanding that here we are referring to brahmaṇas. The actual phrase nāma-brahmaṇi refers to the holy name (nāma) of the transcendental and absolute (brahmaṇi) Lord.
2. Svalpa-puṇyavatan or svalpa-puṇyavatāṁ is another misarticulated phrase in this verse. Svalpa (formed from su-alpa) means "very meager" and puṇyavatāṁ means "stock of pious credit."

śarīra avidyā-jāl³, jaḍendriya tāhe kāl,
jīve phele viṣaya-sāgare⁴
tā'ra madhye jihvā ati⁵, lobhamoy sudurmati,
tā'ke jetā kaṭhina sāmsāre⁶

3. Sarirāra vidya jāl and śarirā avidya jāl are both wrong. The actual phrase is śarīra (“body”) + avidyā (“ignorance”) + jāl (“cage”) = “the body is a cage of ignorance.”
4. Viṣāy is incorrect articulation. Viṣaya-sāgare means “ocean of sense enjoyment.”
5. Tāmadhe jivāyati is a common way this phrase is misarticulated. The third line in this verse — tā'ra madhye jihvā ati lobhamoy sudurmati means “of all the senses the tongue (jihvā) is most (ati) voracious (lobhamoy) and uncontrollable (sudurmati).”
6. Tā'ke jetā kaṭhina sāmsare (or sāmsare) is the way the last line of this verse is enunciated when the vowels are intermingled. This phrase is pointing out how difficult it is to overcome the urges of the tongue: tā'ke (“it, the tongue”) + jetā (“to conquer”) + kaṭhina (“difficult”) + sāmsāre (“in this world”).

kṛṣṇa baḍa dayāmay, karibāre jihvā jay⁷,
sva-prasād-anna dilo bhāi⁸
sei annāmṛta⁹ pāo, rādhā-kṛṣṇa-guṇa gāo,
preme ḍāko¹⁰ caitanya-nitāi

7. Baro doymoy and jīva joy are both incorrect. Here are the meanings of the actual words: baḍa means “very much,” dayāmay (pronounced doyāmoy in Bengali) means “merciful,” and jihvā (“tongue”) + jay (“victory”) is about controlling the tongue. Jay is pronounced joy in Bengali.
8. Omitting the “v”, missing the double “nn”, elongating the “i”, and leaving out the “h” causes one to say sa prasād ana dilo bāi. Here is the translation: “O brother!” (bhāi), “Kṛṣṇa is giving” (dilo) “us His personal” (sva) “merciful” (prasād) “remnants of foodstuffs” (anna).
9. Anamṛta is wrongly enunciated in Western accents. Anna (“foodstuffs”) + amṛta (nectarean) are the nectarean foodstuffs we eat in the form of kṛṣṇa-prasāda.
10. Ḍako is another misarticulated word. The last line is asking us to “lovingly” (preme) “call out” (ḍāko) “to Caitanya and Nitāi.”



(kiba) jaya jaya gorācānder āratika¹ śobhā
jāhnavī-taṭa-vane jaga-mana-lobhā

gaurāṅger āratika śobhā
jaga-jana-mana-lobhā

1. There are two common mispronunciations: *ārati kiśoba* and *ārati keśoba*. The phrase *āratika śobhā* refers to the beautiful *ārati* ceremony.

dakṣiṇe nitāicānd², bāme gadādhara³
nikṣe advaita, śrīnivāsa⁴ chatra-dhara

2. *Dakṣiṇe nitāicānd* is the wrong phrasing. Here is the translation of the phrase: “on the right” (*dakṣiṇe*) “is the moonlike Lord Nityānanda” (*nitāi-cānd*).
3. *Gadadār*, *Gādadār*, *Gādedār*, and *Gadhādhara* are some of the many mispronunciations. *Gadādhara* (*gadā* means “mace” and *dhara* means “carrying”) is a name of Lord Viṣṇu, the carrier of the mace. Do not pronounce it *Gadhādhara*, because *gadhā* means “donkey.”
4. Here is the word-for-word: *nikṣe* (“nearby”) + *advaita* (“Advaita Ācārya”) + *śrīnivāsa* (“Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura”) + *chatra-dhara* (“holds an umbrella”). Some devotees recite this line as: *nikṣe advaita prabhu, śrīvāsa chatra-dhara*. They do this to avoid separating *śrīnivāsa* into *śrīnī* and *vāsā* as follows: *nikṣe advaita śrīnī, vāsā chatra-dhara*. However you sing it, avoid separating *śrīnivāsa* into *śrīnī* and *vāsā*.

bosiyāche gorācānd ratna-simhāsane⁵
ārati koreṇa brahmā⁶-ādi deva-gaṇe

5. *Simhāsane* is another misarticulated word. *Ratna-simhāsane* means “upon a jeweled throne.”
6. Omitting the “h” and long ending vowel “ā”, devotees often misarticulate *brahmā* (Lord Brahmā) as *brama*. *Brahma* (note: all short vowels) means transcendence. *Bhrama* (illusion) is a different word altogether.

narahari-ādi kori' cāmara dhulāya⁷
sañjaya-mukunda-vāsu-ghoṣa⁸-ādi gāya

7. *Camara* or *camāra* (meaning “untouchable”) and *ḍulāyā* are the wrong enunciations here. *Cāmara* is the whisk made of yak tail, and *dhulāya* refers to waving or fanning.
8. *Ghoṣo* is not correct. *Vāsu Ghoṣa* is one of the elevated associates of Lord Caitanya who used to sing for the Lord's pleasure.

śaṅkha bāje ghaṇṭā bāje bāje karatāla⁹
madhura¹⁰ mṛdaṅga¹¹ bāje parama rasāla

śaṅkha bāje ghaṇṭā bāje
madhur madhur madhur bāje

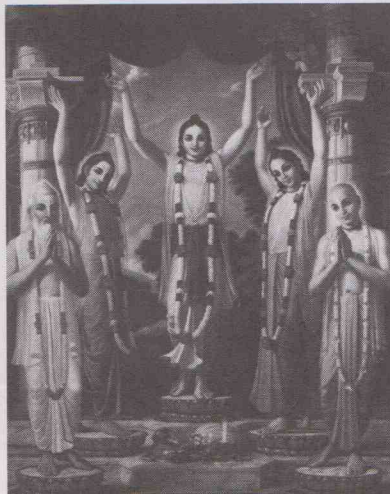
9. The three musical instruments śaṅkha, ghaṇṭā, and karatāla are often mispronounced as śaṅkā (this word actually means “doubt”) by omitting the “h” and elongating the ending vowel, gaṇṭa by shortening the ending vowel, and karatāla (hardening the “t” into a “ṭ”).
10. Māḍūrā is a common Western-accented mispronunciation of the word madhura, which means “sweet.”
11. Mirdanga, mṛdanga, mrudanga, mardang, and mardinga are some of the many deviations for the drum called mṛdaṅga, which is formed by mṛda (“clay”) + aṅga (“limb” or “body”).

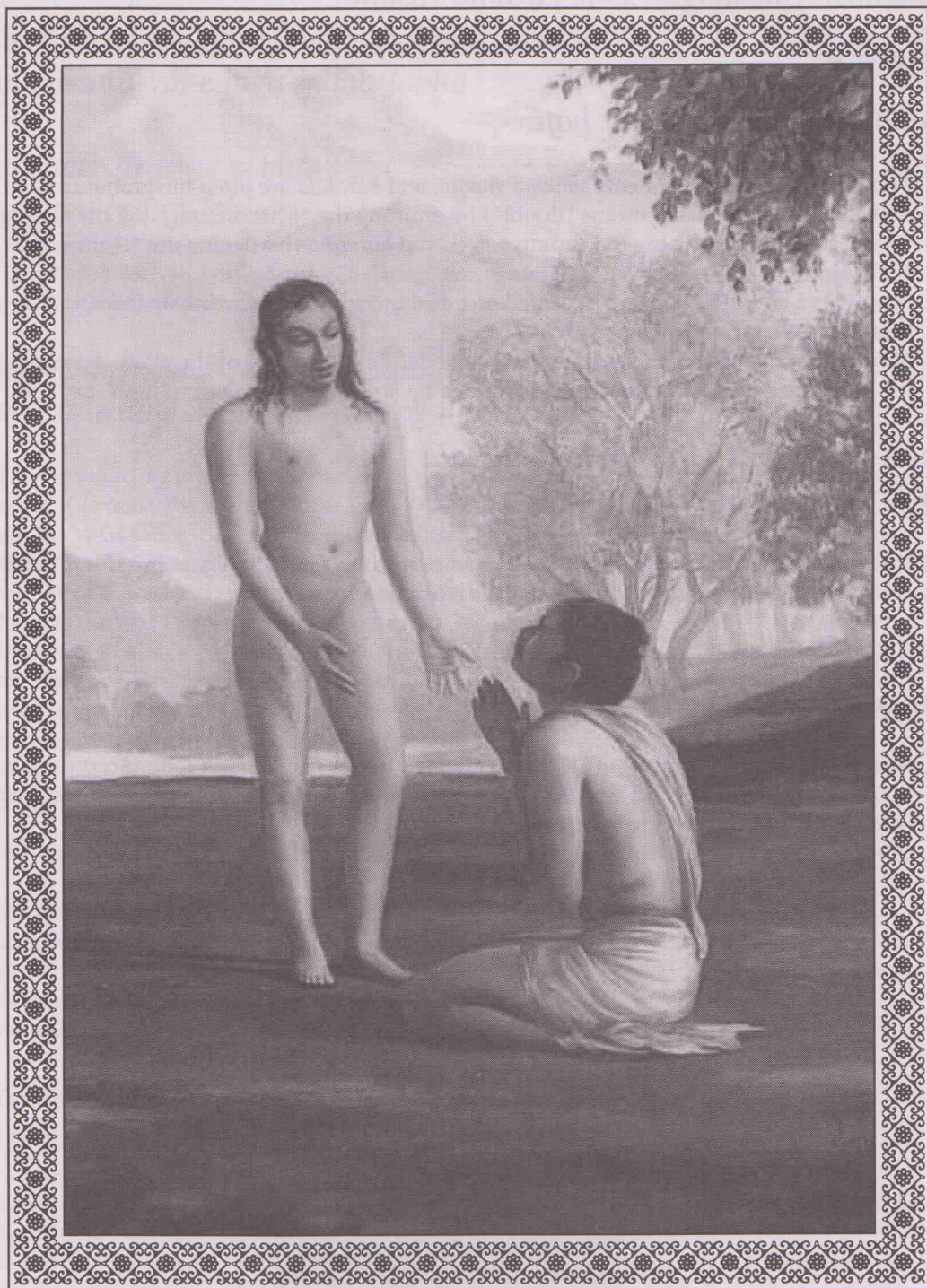
bahu-koṭi candra jini' vadana ujjala
gala¹²-deśe vana-mālā kore jhālamala¹³

12. Note that there are no long vowels in vadana (meaning “face”) and gala (meaning “neck”).
13. Note the “jh” at the beginning of jhālamala (meaning “shining”).

śiva-śuka-nārada preme gada-gada¹⁴
bhakativinoda dekhe gorāra¹⁵ sampada

14. Note that the ending vowels of all the highlighted words here are not long. According to this line, the voices of Lord Śiva, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, and Nārada Muni are all choked up (gada gada) in pure ecstatic love (preme) of God.
15. Gorara and gorarā are incorrect. Gorāra means “of Lord Caitanya.”





6

Questions & Answers (*Praśnottara*)

6.1 Strictness

Q: Is it not a *smārta-brāhmaṇa*-type approach to be strict about pronunciation?

A: Śrīla Prabhupāda defines a *smārta-brāhmaṇa* as “one who strictly follows all the Vedic principles on the mundane platform” (*Cc. Madhya* 12.180). In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (8.19.33, purport), Prabhupāda says: “A *smārta-brāhmaṇa* is always interested in material profit, whereas a Vaiṣṇava is only interested in satisfying the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” So if we can please the Supreme Personality of Godhead by glorifying Him more nicely with proper pronunciation of prayers and verses, that certainly is not the approach of a *smārta-brāhmaṇa*, but a smart Vaiṣṇava approach.

That is our philosophy: Everything perfect for Krishna!

Letter, January 20, 1972

6.2 Pronouncing it Right

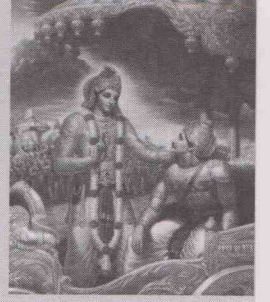
Q: Why should I bother to take the time to pronounce Sanskrit and Bengali properly, when there are so many more important things for us to do?

A: Here are some reasons why devotees should ensure that they pronounce mantras and Vaiṣṇava songs and prayers correctly.

1. To please Śrīla Prabhupāda and the previous *ācāryas*, who imparted to us the Vedic scriptures and authored supplementary Vaiṣṇava literature.
2. To promote a better service attitude toward *śāstras* and the holy name.
3. To enhance ISKCON's credibility in the academic field and other public arenas.
4. To establish in ISKCON a good tradition of correct pronunciation as a cultural embellishment and to reestablish the original pronunciation of the mantras, an important Vedic standard. Just as the systems of *yoga* and *dharma* wane over time, the proper pronunciation of mantras also declines. Lord Kṛṣṇa says:

एवं परम्पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।
स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परन्तप ॥

*evaṁ paramparā-prāptam
imaṁ rājarsayo viduḥ
sa kāleneha mahatā
yogo naśtaḥ parantapa*



This supreme science was received through the chain of disciplic succession, and the saintly kings understood it in that way. But in course of time the succession was broken, and therefore the science as it is appears to be lost.

Bhagavad-gītā 4.2



Good pronunciation of mantras was a standard for passing down the *Vedas* and *vedāṅgas*. If good pronunciation is distorted, then the method for passing down the original knowledge will be distorted. This book is an effort to revive the original standard of *mantroccāraṇam*.

Even though Prabhupāda had so many important activities to do in the preaching mission of Lord Caitanya, he still set the standard by dedicating large amounts of time in his lectures to teaching devotees the correct pronunciation of verses. The task of learning the correct pronunciation is not time consuming.

6.3 Learn by Listening

Q: I was told to listen to others sing and to learn by listening. What is wrong with doing that?

A: Nothing, if you hear from someone who has learned properly. We can apply the principle of “guru, *sādhū*, and *śāstra*” here. We should know that by consistently and concurrently referring to these three sources of knowledge, we will be kept safely on the path of the previous *ācāryas*. This is true of all the *śāstras*, including our Vaiṣṇava songbook. We can read the songs as they are written there, listen to the spiritual master and the *sādhūs* as they sing, and in this way ascertain the correct pronunciation.

If members of the *paramparā*, or disciplic succession, do not hear attentively, the message will continue to be successively altered as it is passed down from one generation to the next. This mishap can be avoided by attentive hearing (*ekāgracitta śravaṇam*) and speaking or reciting with clear pronunciation (*pavitra kīrtanam*).

6.4 A Bengali Accent & Sanskrit Pronunciation

Q: Prabhupāda used to say *Parīkhit*, *jagya*, and so on. How could Prabhupāda be wrong?

A: Śrīla Prabhupāda's body was from Bengal, so it was natural for him to say “*Parīkhit*, *khatriya*,” etc. But everyone need not imitate Bengali-Sanskrit pronunciation. If I try to copy Śrīla Prabhupāda's accent, it will be an unnatural and unnecessary imitation. Prabhupāda also would not insist on such a thing. When Śrīla Prabhupāda pronounced Sanskrit, it was occasionally with a Bengali accent, but often without. Thus he showed flexibility in his pronunciation according to time, place and circumstance.

6.5 Finding Faults

Q: Shouldn't we avoid being picky or finding faults with devotees?

A: By correcting their real or apparent faults in an appropriate manner, we are saving that devotee from possible criticism. No one should have any cause to criticize a devotee of the Supreme Lord.

6.6 Sanskrit with Accents

Q: Whether you chant the *maha-mantra* with a French or a Chinese accent, isn't it the same? Isn't the devotion what matters?

A: We are not all pure devotees. We are following the process of *vaidhī-bhakti*. Therefore we should pronounce the *mahā-mantra* as it is.

6.7 Mahā-mantra Chanting

Q: What's wrong with chanting the *mahā-mantra* in different ways?

A: Mispronunciation is not a disqualification in chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. Nonetheless, it is considered polite, courteous, cultured, and respectful if one makes the effort to correctly pronounce a name, word, or language.

In this connection, Aindra Prabhu commented: “If a girl loves a boy, she naturally loves the sound of his name. In Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Vidagdha- mādhyava*, Paurṇamāsī Devī

exclaims with great wonder, 'How much nectar is contained in the two syllables Kṛṣṇa!' The sound of the holy name embodies the nectar of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's personality. So if we want to relish the sweetness of His personality, then we will do well to hear the actual sound of His name. For this reason, correct pronunciation of Kṛṣṇa's names is desirable. For example, if we say 'Gishna,' we should reconsider what it is we are relishing. We should be aware enough to notice whether our pronunciation corresponds to the diacritic marks in the pronunciation guide in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

6.8 Word-for-word Translations

Q: Should we learn songs by singing or by reciting word-for-word translations?

A: Whichever is easier for you. When we sing a song, we are doing *kīrtanam* and *smaraṇam*. We have heard a song (*śravaṇam*), and we sing it (*kīrtanam*) from our memory (*smaraṇam*.) If we have heard it wrong, then we remember it wrong and sing it wrong. But if we have heard it correctly, then we can remember it correctly. We should use Prabhupāda's books to recognize the wrong pronunciation and learn the correct pronunciation. Then we will be able to pronounce our daily prayers much better and without difficulty.

6.9 Learning Sanskrit Pronunciation

Q: What if I do not pronounce Sanskrit properly?

A: To this question, Prabhupāda replied: "You can learn Sanskrit. You can pronounce very nicely. It requires learning. That's all."

Prabhupāda: Why not? You can pronounce properly. Everything you can learn, just like I am speaking in English. English is not my mother language, but I have tried to learn it, and I am doing my business. That's all. Similarly, you can learn any language. You can learn Sanskrit. You can pronounce very nicely. It requires learning. That's all.

Lecture, June 12, 1968



Prabhupāda did not want lazy followers. He arduously wrote and published books as his contribution to society, and he wanted his disciples to use the diacritics and special features in his books to their advantage.

We do not have to know Sanskrit to pronounce it, but it helps. If one has the desire, learning basic Sanskrit pronunciation is not difficult. To learn to pronounce properly, there is no need to undergo full training in Sanskrit, which includes studying *Śikṣā* (phonetics), *Vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *Chandas* (meters), and *Nirukta* (dictionary).

6.10 Imitating Pronunciation

Q: We heard that devotees change their pronunciation after they hear their seniors or devotees in India speaking and singing. Is this true?

A: Many of our *kīrtanas* are led by gurus and senior Vaiṣṇavas who may not have such good pronunciation. New devotees easily copy incorrect pronunciation. They think, “My guru cannot be wrong.” However, educated devotees can discern the difference between incorrect and correct pronunciation.

6.11 A Sanskrit Style of Pronunciation

Q: Is there a Sanskrit style of pronouncing Sanskrit?

A: This is debatable, because different localities have adapted Sanskrit to their way of speaking. In Bengal it becomes Bengalized, in North India it becomes Hindized, and in South India it becomes differently accented. So which accent should we adopt? Actually, all we have to do is follow the exact tongue movements described in section 2.5.2 on consonant and vowel pronunciation. Then we can judge for ourselves whether our pronunciation meets the standard. Sanskrit phonetics is so scientific that the words cannot be pronounced wrong if we are conscious of the tongue’s movements for particular letters. We just need to make sure that the tongue is going to the right points of articulation. Combine the places of tongue movements with the specific amount of air to be exhaled for aspirated and non-aspirated consonants, and one is bound to pronounce correctly. At the very least, we should examine our tongue movements, and we will then realize the changes we need to make. If the Sanskrit alphabet is properly practiced, we should not feel any ambiguity in pronunciation. Some individuals may find it difficult to move the tongue to particular points in the mouth, but with enough practice they should be able to overcome their linguistic conditioning.

6.12 Pronouncing the Visarga

Q: Should the visarga (*h*) be fully pronounced?

A: South Indians more fully pronounce the *visargas*, like those in *īśvaraḥ paramaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*, and North Indians generally minimize a *visarga* if it is not at the end of a sentence. If we analyze the grammar, including the *sandhis* and so on, then the South Indian style is more correct. But we will get into problems if we standardize it one way or the other.

6.13 Basic Rules

Q: What about basic rules?

A: Basic rules like case endings are mainly for pronunciation. It is good to have a basic understanding of these. For example, you should know why we say *īśvaraḥ paramaḥ kṛṣṇaḥ*. If you do not know the significance of the *ḥ* sound, then you will not want to say it at all and may leave it out. In this sense, you will need a little grammatical understanding to see why you have to pronounce words as they are. But it could be very simple. The basic concept behind the endings of the above words is that those endings relate the word to the rest of the sentence. So if you say the wrong ending, you end up with a different sentence and meaning.

6.14 Adaptable Vocabulary

Q: You say the vocabulary is unchanging. Does this mean that the vocabulary cannot expand and new words cannot be expressed in Sanskrit?

A: No. Sanskrit has the capacity to grow. To start with, it has a very large vocabulary to meet the demands of a vast range of subjects. However, changing times and the explosion of knowledge may require that the language be able to put forth fresh forms to meet the expanded needs. Several reputed scholars say that Sanskrit has this potency and capacity to widen itself without losing its individuality. So it has vitality and adaptability. Sanskrit has all the basic components that one could wish to express, and one combines a few of those components and makes another modern word.

7

Practical Implementation & Resources (*Prasāraṇa*)

Learn and Teach: Śrīla Prabhupāda always encouraged us to learn and teach. A *brāhmaṇa*'s duty is to learn and teach.

Names: One thing we would like devotees to do is review their names and make sure they are correctly writing and pronouncing their names.

Leaders' Responsibility: Reforming pronunciation is only possible when education in ISKCON improves. The leaders have to properly understand what their mistakes are and correct them. Then their followers will quickly pick it up. The first devotees to read this book should be gurus, because they are always in front of the microphone.

Some Points for Promoting Correct Pronunciation

- Encourage *kīrtana* leaders to properly learn the songs before leading.
- This pronunciation guide will be distributed free to ISKCON educational facilities such as temples, *gurukulas*, schools, and so on.
- Devotees are encouraged to enroll in ISKCON courses on Sanskrit.
- Teach what you have personally understood about correct pronunciation.
- Everyone should read and study the songbook and sing from it often, concentrating on the diacritics and transliterations, word-for-word meanings, and so on.
- It is the responsibility of ISKCON's leaders to properly pronounce Sanskrit and set a good example, especially when they give classes.
- Approach Indian devotees for assistance.
- We chant a verse in the morning class every day. With good practice, one could become expert at chanting Sanskrit within a short time. Listen to and learn from the members of your local Indian congregation as they responsively chant the verse.
- We would like the mood of using correct pronunciation to spread. When you have read this information, please give a class on this topic or conduct a short seminar in your temple.

People to approach for help with good pronunciation:

Hṛdayānanda Mahārāja, Lokanātha Mahārāja, Gopīparāñadhana Prabhu, Bhakti Vikāsa Mahārāja, Basu Ghosh Prabhu, Rādhā Govinda Mahārāja, Rādhā Ramaṇa Mahārāja, Śyāmānanda Prabhu, Puruṣatraya Mahārāja, Ācārya Saṁskṛtānanda Hari, Rādhā Gopinātha Prabhu (Chowpatty), Rādhikā-Ramaṇa Prabhu, Vidvān Gaurāṅga Prabhu, Yadu Prabhu, Hariveṇu Prabhu, Bharata Rāma Prabhu, Gopinātha Ācārya Prabhu, Dīna Anukampana Prabhu. Contact Aja Govinda Dāsa at aja.goyal@gmail.com for the addresses of others listed here.

Recordings

Audio recordings of the sounds of the Devanāgarī alphabet, verse meters, and the songs of the daily programs will be made available for download from <http://www.lokanathswami.com>.

Guides

The following books are recommended as excellent reference material. All the texts below are designed to teach Sanskrit. The reader may find useful introductory sections on Sanskrit pronunciation in these books.

- Bhaktivedanta Swami Language School. "Sanskrit: *Bhagavad-Gita* Grammar."
- Coulson, Michael. "Teach Yourself Sanskrit." *Teach Yourself* series (registered trademark of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.) printed by McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., 2003.
- Dasa, Dina-Anukampana. "*Srimad Bhagavad-gita* Slokas for Daily Recitation."
- Dasa, Harivenu. "Sanskrit: An Introductory Course Based on Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's Grammar" Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Language School. Shiv Hari Press Vrindavan, 2000.
- Dasa, Harivenu, et al. "Sanskrit *Bhagavad-Gita* Grammar" Book Series of the Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Language School. Rasbihari Lal & Sons, 2001.
- Macdonell, Arthur A. "A Sanskrit Grammar for Students." Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1997.
- Sampad & Vijay. "The Wonder that Is Sanskrit." Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, in association with Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2006.

Web sites

English-Sanskrit exercises can be found at these links:

- Coulson, Michael. "Teach Yourself Sanskrit" Web link: <http://www.teachyourself.co.uk/tysanskritsupplementary.htm>
- Wikner, Charles. "A Practical Sanskrit Introductory." Available from <ftp://ftp.nac.ac.za/wikner/sktintro.ps600-jan02>, 1996.
- Wikner, Charles. "Vedic Accents." Available from <ftp://ftp.nac.ac.za/wikner/accent.ps600-june97>, 1997.

Software

The Devanāgarī Converter can aid the Sanskrit typist by converting words written in roman transliterated font into the Devanāgarī equivalents.

Appendix

A1 Harināmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī wrote the *Harināmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa*, a text that teaches one how to learn Sanskrit grammar with names of Lord Kṛṣṇa. In his book, all the grammatical cases are shown in relation to the Lord.

In *Harināmāmṛta-vyākaraṇa* the vowels are called *sarveśvaras*. *Sarveśvara* means “the controller of everything,” or God. Just as God is independent, similarly, vowels are also independent, in the sense that they can be pronounced independently, without reference to any other letter.

The first ten *sarveśvaras* are called *daśavatāras*, and they appear in five pairs called *ekātmakas*: “having one soul”. One is short, the other long. The short ones are called *vāmana*, and the long ones *trivikrama*. The *vāmana* takes one time unit to pronounce, and the *trivikrama* takes two time units.

The consonants are called *viṣṇujanas*. *Viṣṇujana* means devotee of Viṣṇu. Just as a *bhakta* is always associated with the Lord and fully dependent on Him, the *viṣṇujana* needs a *sarveśvara* (vowel) for its pronunciation.

The association of two *viṣṇujanas*, or two consonants together, is called *sat-saṅga*. The letter *m* (*anusvāra*) is called *viṣṇu-cakra*, and *ḥ* (*visarga*) is called *viṣṇusarga*.

From *ka* to *ma*, each group of five letters is called *viṣṇuvarga*, and each group is named after the first letter: *ka-varga*, *ca-varga*, and so on.

Corresponding terms used by Pāṇini and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī

Pāṇini-vyakāraṇa	Harināmāmṛta-vyakāraṇa	definition
<i>svara</i>	<i>sarveśvara</i>	vowels: <i>a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, au, r, ṛ, l</i>
<i>prathama-daśa-svara</i>	<i>daśavatāra</i>	first ten vowels: <i>a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, au</i>
<i>pañca-dvi-svara</i>	<i>ekātmaka</i>	in five pairs: { <i>a,ā</i> } { <i>i,ī</i> } { <i>u,ū</i> } { <i>e,ai</i> } { <i>o,au</i> }
<i>hrasva-svara</i>	<i>vāmana</i>	short vowels: <i>a, i, u, r, l</i>
<i>dirgha-svara</i>	<i>trivikrama</i>	long vowels: <i>ā, ī, ū, ṛ, ḷ, e, ai, o, au</i>
<i>vyañjana</i>	<i>viṣṇujana</i>	consonants: <i>ka, kha, ga, gha, etc.</i>
<i>saṃyuktākṣara</i>	<i>sat-saṅga</i>	conjunct consonants: <i>kṣa, jña, tra, etc.</i>
<i>varga</i>	<i>viṣṇuvarga</i>	in groups of five: <i>ka-varga, ca-varga, etc.</i>
<i>anusvāra</i>	<i>viṣṇucakra</i>	nasal humming sound: <i>m</i>
<i>candrabindu</i>	<i>viṣṇucāpa</i>	mark indicating a nasalized vowel
<i>visarga</i>	<i>viṣṇusarga</i>	short echo of preceding sound: <i>ḥ</i>

Throughout the centuries, the Sanskrit language has been written in a variety of alphabets. The mode of writing most widely used throughout India, however, is *devanāgarī*, “the city-writing of the *devas*, or gods.” The Devanāgarī alphabet consists of forty-eight characters (thirteen vowels and thirty-five consonants). The ancient Sanskrit grammarians arranged the alphabet according to concise linguistic principles, and this arrangement was accepted by all Western scholars. The system of transliteration used in this book and by the BBT to indicate the pronunciation of each Sanskrit sound conforms to a scholarly system that in the last fifty to a hundred years has been almost universally accepted.

The short vowel *a* is pronounced like the “u” in *but*; long *a* like the “a” in *far*; and short *i* like the “i” in *pin*. A long *ī* is pronounced like the “i” in *pique*; a short *u* like the “u” in *pull*, and a long *ū* like the “u” in *rule*. The vowel *r* is pronounced like the “ri” in *rim*. The vowel *e* is pronounced like the “e” in *they*; *ai* like the “ai” in *aisle*; *o* like the “o” in *go*, and *au* like the “ow” in *how*. The *anusvāra* (*m̐*), which is a pure nasal, is pronounced like the *n* in the French word *bon*, and the *visarga* (*h*), which is a strong aspirate, is pronounced as a final *h* sound that echoes the vowel; thus *aḥ* is pronounced *aha*, and *iḥ* as *ihi*.

The guttural consonants *k*, *kh*, *g*, *gh*, and *ṅ* are pronounced from the throat in much the same manner as in English. *K* is pronounced as in *kite*, *kh* as in *Eckhart*, *g* as in *give*, *gh* as in *dig hard*, and *ṅ* as in *sing*. The palatal consonants *c*, *ch*, *j*, *jh*, and *ñ* are pronounced from the palate with the middle of the tongue. *C* is pronounced as in *chair*, *ch* as in *staunch heart*, *j* as in *joy*, *jh* as in *hedgehog*, and *ñ* as in *canyon*. The cerebral consonants *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh*, and *ṇ* are pronounced with the tip of the tongue turned up and drawn back against the dome of the palate. *Ṭ* is pronounced as in *tub*, *ṭh* as in *light heart*, *ḍ* as in *dove*, *ḍh* as in *red-hot*, and *ṇ* as in *nut*. The dental consonants *t*, *th*, *d*, *dh*, and *n* are pronounced in the same manner as the cerebrals but with the forepart of the tongue against the teeth. The labial consonants *p*, *ph*, *b*, *bh*, and *m* are pronounced with the lips. *P* is pronounced as in *pine*, *ph* as in *uphill*, *b* as in *bird*, *bh* as in *rub hard*, and *m* as in *mother*. The semivowels *y*, *r*, *l*, and *v* are pronounced as in *yes*, *run*, *light*, and *vine*, respectively. The sibilants *ś*, *ṣ*, and *s* are pronounced as in the German word *sprechen* and the English words *shine* and *sun*, respectively. The letter *h* is pronounced as in *home*.

Symbol for *daṇḍa*: |

Symbol for double *daṇḍa*: ||

In Sanskrit prose, the only punctuation marks are a single *daṇḍa*, used to mark the end of a sentence, and a double *daṇḍa*, used to mark the end of a paragraph. In Sanskrit verses, a single *daṇḍa* is placed midway through a *śloka*, and a double *daṇḍa* is placed at the end of it. The single vertical bar in the Devanāgarī marks the end of a half verse, and the double bars, with the verse number between them, mark the end of a full verse. Note that the Devanāgarī is written in two “lines”, but the transliteration shows four.

Numbers (*saṃkhyā*) in Devanāgarī for the first nine digits are shown here, along with the Sanskrit terminology:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
०	१	२	३	४	५	६	७	८	९
śūnya	eka	dvi	tri	catur	pañcan	ṣaṣ	saptan	aṣṭan	navan
शून्य	एक	द्वि	त्रि	चतुर	पञ्चन्	षष्	सप्तन्	अष्टन्	नवन्

A4 Halanta

Symbol for *halanta*: ~

A *halanta* marks the absence of the final “a”-ending sound in a word’s last consonant. *Halanta* = *hal* (consonant) + *anta* (end): i.e., ending with a consonant. So a *halanta* signifies that a word ends with a consonant, not a vowel. Here are examples of *ka* without the *halanta* and *k* with the *halanta*:

ka	क
k	क्

For example, राम = *Rāmā* has an inherent “a” ending sound. However, one can purposefully omit the ending “a” by marking the word with a *halanta* as follows: राम् = *Rām*. In the chanting of the *mahā-mantra*, if *Rāma* is chanted as *Rām*, then the name is not being uttered completely and correctly. The devotee should ensure that they chant the ending “a” vibration at the end of *Rāma*.

A5 Dependents (Parāśrita)

The two main dependents are discussed in section 2.6. Two other Vedic dependents are mentioned here:

The third dependent, *jihvāmūliya*, is a sibilant-substitute for the *ka*-varga (the *kaṇṭhya*, or guttural consonants). It indicates a half *visarga*. It is shaped in Devanāgarī as two concave lines opposite each other: ≍

The fourth dependent, *upadhmāniya*, is a sibilant-substitute for the *pa*-varga (the *oṣṭhya*, or labial consonants). It also indicates a half *visarga*. It is shaped in Devanāgarī as two lines intersecting each other to form a cross: ×

When a consonant is followed by a vowel, the script, or *mātrā*, changes as shown on the right side of the following figure. The thirty-three consonants are shown on the left and the modifications to the vowel suffixed to the consonant are shown on the right.

अ	<i>a</i>	Has no vowel sign as it is inherent in all consonants.	
आ	<i>ā</i>	becomes	।
इ	<i>i</i>	becomes	ि
ई	<i>ī</i>	becomes	ी
उ	<i>u</i>	becomes	ु
ऊ	<i>ū</i>	becomes	ू
ऋ	<i>r</i>	becomes	ृ
ॠ	<i>r̄</i>	becomes	ॠ
ऌ	<i>l</i>	becomes	ॡ
ए	<i>e</i>	becomes	े
ऐ	<i>ai</i>	becomes	ै
ओ	<i>o</i>	becomes	ो
औ	<i>au</i>	becomes	ौ

Three more symbols for sounds that act in place of vowels:

ॠ	<i>m</i>	stay as	ॠ
ः	<i>h</i>		ः
ँ	marks absence of 'a'		ँ

Without a vowel, a consonant is not a syllable. When the consonant is combined with a vowel, then it becomes a complete syllable. The next chart show how consonants are suffixed with different vowels.

k	क्	+	a	अ	=	ka	क
k	क्	+	ā	आ	=	kā	का
k	क्	+	i	इ	=	ki	कि
k	क्	+	ī	ई	=	kī	की
k	क्	+	u	उ	=	ku	कु
k	क्	+	ū	ऊ	=	kū	कू
k	क्	+	r	ऋ	=	kr	कृ
k	क्	+	ṛ	ॠ	=	kṛ	कृ
k	क्	+	l	लृ	=	kl	कृ
k	क्	+	e	ए	=	ke	के
k	क्	+	ai	ऐ	=	kai	कै
k	क्	+	o	ओ	=	ko	को
k	क्	+	au	औ	=	kau	कौ
k	क्	+	aṁ	अं	=	kaṁ	कं
k	क्	+	aḥ	अः	=	kaḥ	कः

The following tables show how three consonants are suffixed with vowels:

क	का	कि	की	कु	कू	कृ	कृ	कृ	के	कै	को	कौ	कं	कः
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū	kr	kṛ	kl	ke	kai	ko	kau	kaṁ	kaḥ

ख	खा	खि	खी	खु	खू	खृ	खृ	खृ	खे	खै	खो	खौ	खं	खः
kha	khā	khi	khi	khu	khū	khṛ	khṛ	khḥ	khe	khai	kho	khau	khaṁ	khaḥ

ग	गा	गि	गी	गु	गू	गृ	गृ	गृ	गे	गै	गो	गौ	गं	गः
ga	gā	gi	gī	gu	gū	gr	gṛ	gl	ge	gai	go	gau	gaṁ	gaḥ

Vaṅga-bhāṣā is the original Sanskrit term for “Bengali.” In the course of our daily readings and recitations, we deal with two languages: Sanskrit and Bengali. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and the *Bhagavad-gītā* are written in Sanskrit, and the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* is written in an old, rarely used form of Bengali called *sādhū-bhāṣā*.

I have often heard Bengali pronunciation used in Sanskrit verses and Sanskrit pronunciation in Bengali songs. This is improper and unnecessary. It may be acceptable if a native Bengali speaks Sanskrit with an accent, but most of us are not native Bengalis. If you sing a Bengali song using Sanskrit pronunciation, it sounds funny, and a Bengali would not understand what you are saying. We should pronounce Bengali as a Bengali would.

Using Sanskrit pronunciation for Bengali words was adopted by our BBT departments. The BBT Style Sheet says, “Our standard for transliterating Bengali matches each Bengali letter to an invariant roman counterpart, regardless of pronunciation. This makes transliterating easy to do and enables a reader to tell the true Bengali spelling. On the other hand, in Bengali (as in English) one letter or combination of letters may stand for any of various sounds, and our transliteration does nothing to indicate which one. Thus a reader has to find out by other means that, for example, the word transliterated *haya* is pronounced *hoy* (rhyming with *boy*). Of course, strictly phonetic systems (which the experts call *transcription* rather than *transliteration*) have their own problems, especially because pronunciation may differ from region to region, and speaker to speaker. The merits and demerits of each system aside, our system is the one Śrīla Prabhupāda directed us to use.”

Look at the Hindi *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* printed by the Mumbai BBT, and you will find the Bengali verse transliterations all written using Sanskrit pronunciation. In other words, the transliteration does not follow the correct pronunciation indicated by the original Bengali verses. Śrīla Prabhupāda told his editors to give the Bengali transliteration according to the spelling, not according to the pronunciation. This is also how we have it in the English *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*: for example, *haya* instead of *hoy*.

To help avoid further confusion, it would be useful if devotees would learn (1) which language a particular song or verse is written in and (2) some specifics of Bengali pronunciation. Doing this will be beneficial because we will also learn more about the tradition and origins of the great Vaiṣṇava songs and songwriters.

Sādhū-bhāṣā and Chālī-bhāṣā

Because Bengali is a colloquial (conversational or informal) language, some letter sounds are pronounced differently today than they were hundreds of years ago. Therefore even the correct Roman transliterations of the Bengali verses found in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* often fail to accurately represent the way the language would be read and spoken by a modern Bengali.

Bhūmipati Prabhu: *Sādhū-bhāṣā*, the language the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* is written in, is the ancient form of modern Bengali. In the course of time, shortcuts were made in the pronunciation, and many words changed. Now Bengalis speak what is called Chālī (calita)-bhāṣā, a simplified form of *sādhū-bhāṣā*. This is the spoken language of the villages and cities; *sādhū-bhāṣā* is found mostly in literature. Although it is rare now, previously all Bengali books and songs were written in *sādhū-bhāṣā*.

The songs of Narottama dāṣa Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, and the books and commentaries of Bhaktisiddhānta Mahārāja are written using *sādhū-bhāṣā*. Many Bengali words are taken from Sanskrit, so in Bengali commentaries and Bengali books and songs much Sanskrit is used. But *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Caitanya-māṅgala*, and *Caitanya-bhāgavata* are original Bengali; they do not take from Sanskrit like that. Bengali is closely derived from Sanskrit, and as such there are some differences in pronunciation.

Specifics of Bengali Pronunciation

Pradyumna: [leads chanting]

'ke āmi', 'kene āmāya jāre tāpa-traya'

ihā nāhi jāni-'kemanē hita haya'

Prabhupāda: Like that, but there is no mistake. But the [laughs] technical. So it is finished? Kene? Finished? [laughter] There was one governor, a Mr. Carmichael. So in India, in British period, every officer had to learn the local language. We were students in the Scottish Church College. All our professors were Europeans, but during their service they had to learn Bengali. So one governor, Mr. Carmichael, he was called for presiding over a meeting. So he wanted to speak in Bengali. So he said *dekhite dekhite kimbhasa kartiya gele*. So the pronunciation is *galo*, but he said *gele*. So people were smiling. So there are some technical problems, just like we pronounce something and it is not to the correct, current pronunciation. But when we are reading Bengali, let us do it, as far as possible, as the Bengalis do. That's all. Otherwise, there is no mistake. Go on.

Lecture, July 7, 1976

Sanskrit is a phonetic language, pronounced as it is written, but Bengali is not – some words are not pronounced the way they are written. To make the distinction between Sanskrit and Bengali pronunciation, one should know some of the common differences of pronunciation between the two languages.

The most common difference devotees hear is the difference in the pronunciation of “Caitanya” and “Nityānanda.” People from Bengal will not pronounce the “y” in either of these names; instead, they pronounce them as “Caitana” and “Nītānanda.” This is similar to the way that people do not pronounce the “l” in the English word “talk.”

Some aspects of Bengali pronunciation definitely sprouted from a certain branch of Vedic phonetics specific to the *Yajur-veda brāhmaṇas*. The difference became exaggerated over time, as is always the case with *saṁskṛta* transforming into *prākṛta*. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī's *Harināmāmṛta-vyakāraṇa* documents one of these phonetic differences: the pronunciation of *ya* as nearly *ja* in a certain positioning. Toward the end of the first chapter, Jīva Gosvāmī discusses *īṣat-sparśi* and *īṣat-sparśitara*, or the slightly-touching consonants *ya*, *ra*, *la*, and *va*.

Another peculiarity of Bengali phonetics traceable to Vedic roots is the purely labial pronunciation of *va* as *ba*, which sounds closer to the English *w*, as opposed to the common, mixed dental-labial pronunciation. Another example is the simultaneous rather than consecutive pronunciation of *k* and *ṣa* in *kṣa* (which gradually became one with the aspirated *kha* in Bengali vernacular). Despite the variations in phonetics, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī has stated that the Bengali accent is an acceptable form of Sanskrit pronunciation.

In Sanskrit, there are three types of *s* sound: *s*, *ṣ*, and *ś*. In Bengali there is no such distinction. The letters *s*, *ṣ*, and *ś* are pronounced as *ś*. Prabhupāda himself said *praśāda*, and didn't distinguish between the three different kinds of sibilants. However, sometimes he did. More educated Bengalis often distinguish the three different sibilants.

In written Bengali, many times the “a” is actually pronounced “o”. However, the inconsistent placing of “o” for short “a” creates confusion as to how the sound should be produced.

A few years ago there was a controversy in Western Canada about how to pronounce Lord Caitanya's name. Some people said it should be "Chuytanya" some people say "Caitanya". I always say "Caitanya," but from the way that it is spelled, it looks like it should be "Chuytanya". I believe that Prabhupāda said "Caitanya," but that might be a local pronunciation.

Here is a table with some Sanskrit words and the equivalent Bengali pronunciation.

Sanskrit	Bengali
Vṛndāvana	Brindāban
vāsī	bāsī
kṣatriya	khatrīya
Lakṣmi	Lakhī
dayā	doyā
Caitanya	Coitanna
Nityānanda	Nitt,ānanda
Yamunā	Jamunā
yoga	joga
prasāda	prasādam

Śrīla Prabhupāda was from Bengal and spoke Sanskrit with a Bengali accent. His accent is particularly evident in the lecture tapes of 1966. But soon thereafter he began reciting the Sanskrit verses with less of a Bengali accent, and whenever he would quote the *Gītā* or the *Bhāgavatam*, he used pure Sanskrit pronunciation. Some individual words such as *kṣatriya*, *yajña*, or *Parikṣit* he would pronounce with a Bengali accent, but generally he did not let it influence his speech.

Although Śrīla Prabhupāda did pronounce certain Sanskrit words with a Bengali accent, if we also do it, that is just imitation. Rather than simply imitating Prabhupāda, it would be better to properly articulate Sanskrit in a dignified manner with knowledge of the associated phonology.

In Bengali words most often the final "a" is silent, but Bengalis were emphasizing it. Generally in English we tend to pronounce that, but in Bengali it is silent. But with Sanskrit we pronounce all letters, and if a letter is "a" it must be pronounced.

Yāhāra prasāde bhāi is printed as *Jāhāra* in some songbooks. So the publishers have already made it Bengali. It should have been printed as *yāhāra*, but the Bengalis would always say *jāhāra*. And in *āmāra ajñāna guru hoyā hana*, there is an "n" there and a nasal sound, but the Bengalis read the same sound as "hoyā". So we are using the Sanskrit diacritics, but they do not exactly fit or are inapplicable for Bengali.

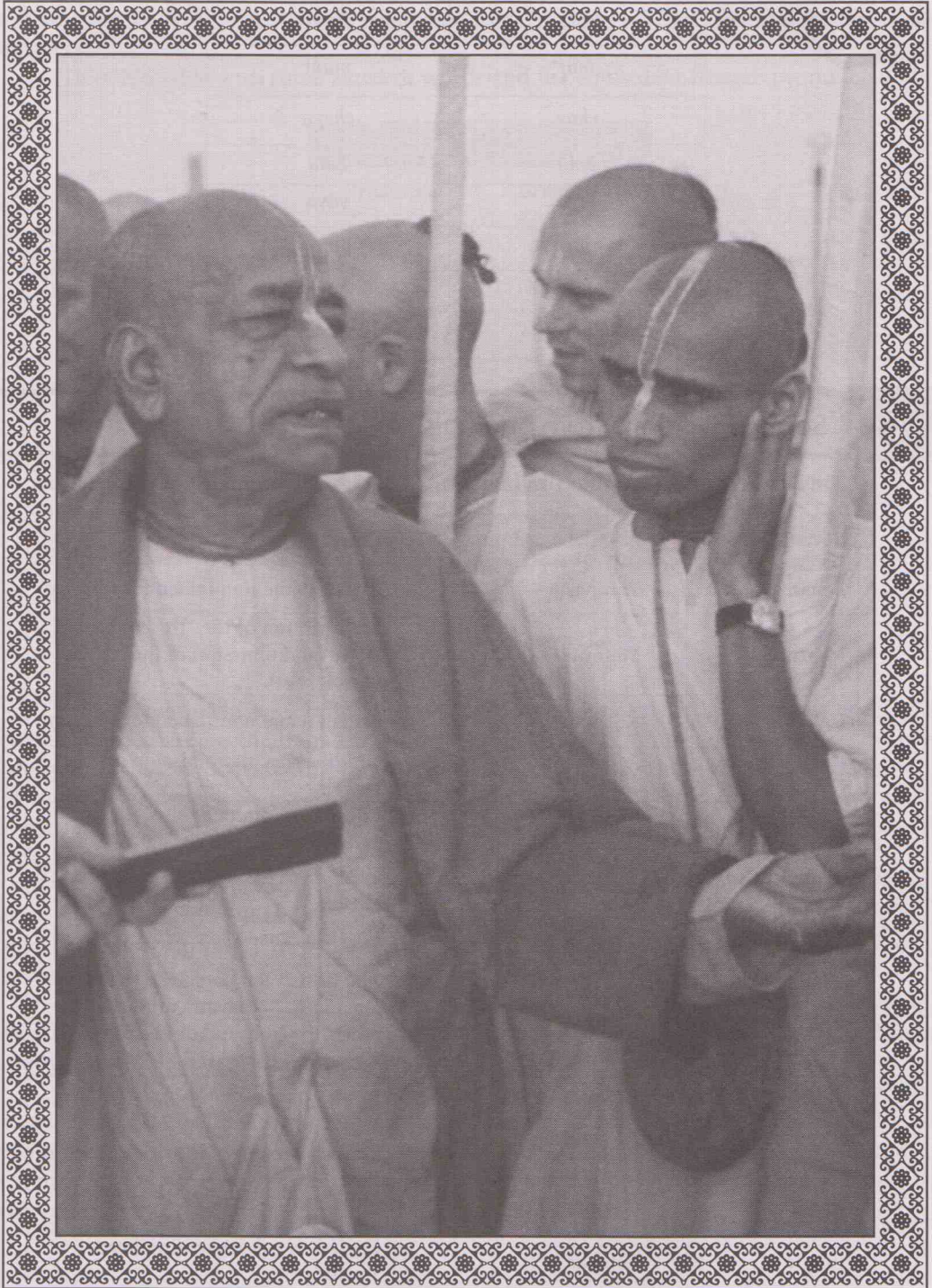
How it's spoken	How it's written in <i>Caitanya-caritāmṛta</i>
<i>hoiyā</i>	<i>hana</i>
<i>boro</i>	<i>baḍa</i>
<i>mui</i>	<i>muñi</i>
<i>choy</i>	<i>chaya</i>
<i>bolo</i>	<i>bala</i>
<i>jāya</i>	<i>yāya</i>
<i>jār</i>	<i>jānra</i>
<i>hoy</i>	<i>haya</i>
<i>koy</i>	<i>kaya</i>

A8

Some deviations from originals

This table displays common Indian terms that are deviations from the original.

deviation	original word/phrase	cause
Benares	Vārāṇasī	British name nominated for the city
Muttra	Mathurā	Modification of the “th” consonant to “tt” and omission of the “u” vowel
Calcutta	Kolakātā	British name nominated for the city
Jumna	Yamunā	Hindi vernacular omission of vowels
Nursing	Narasimha	Ending “a” omitted; also, the <i>anusvāra</i> sounds like “ng” because “h” is a <i>kaṇṭhya</i>
Rabindranath Tagore	Ravindranāth Ṭhākura	Bengali pronunciation spelled in English
Juggernaut	Jagannātha	The British Raj perceived the Jagannāth Rathayātra at Puri as an uncontrollable and devastating force.
<i>deo</i>	Deva	East Indians say “bo” for “va”
Brahmin	Brāhmaṇa	English version of the original word
<i>je mātādi</i>	jaya mātā kī	Punjabi adaptation of the original Sanskrit
jungle	Jāṅgala	English word originating from Sanskrit
Ekankaar	eka omkāra	Sikhs have deviated from the original name of their group.



About the Author

His Holiness Lokanātha Svāmī was born in 1949, in Aravade, a village in Maharashtra, India. While attending college in 1971, he met the Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees at ISKCON's first *paṇḍāl* program in Bombay.

"Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke every evening," he said. "He discussed many issues relating to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and made many points. But the point that had the greatest impact on me, and which attracted me to him and his society more than anything else, was the simple point that if you serve Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, you simultaneously serve everyone and everything else. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the analogy of what happens when one waters a tree. Simply by pouring water on the root of a tree, one automatically waters all the leaves, branches, fruits, and flowers of the tree. This idea greatly appealed to me."

One of ISKCON's first Indian devotees, he received *hari-nāma* initiation in November of 1972 and *sannyāsa* in December of 1975, both from Śrīla Prabhupāda in Vṛndāvana.

In 1976, on Śrīla Prabhupāda's order, he organized a *padayātrā* across India. The first leg of the *padayātrā* traveled from Vṛndavana to Mayapur, stopping in Allahabad at the 1977 Kumbha mela, which Prabhupāda attended. He later expanded this service worldwide in his role as ISKCON's Global Padayātrā Minister, a post he continues to hold. By 1996, *padayātrā* had been held in over one hundred countries worldwide. The *padayātrā* he initially started in India continues to travel. Now, after more than thirty years, the devotees, inspired by Lokanātha Svāmī, distribute books and chant the holy name of the Lord in the towns and villages of India and many countries around the world.

Lokanātha Svāmī served as the temple president of ISKCON New Delhi from 1978 through the mid-1980s. Then he became the zonal secretary for Noida and Maharashtra.

Known for his inspiring *kīrtanas* and talks, Lokanātha Svāmī has attended hundreds of ISKCON festivals worldwide. Śrīla Prabhupāda instructed his *sannyāsis* to travel and preach. Taking this instruction to heart, to date, Lokanātha Svāmī has flown around the world many times, preaching the mission of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He helped develop both the annual Vraja-maṇḍala *parikrama*, which started in 1987, and the annual Navadvīpa-maṇḍala *parikrama*, which began in 1989.

He was appointed the Minister of the Śrīla Prabhupāda Centennial and coordinated a global, four-year campaign for the centennial celebrations in 1996. Lokanātha Svāmī has written the books *Kumbha*, *My Prabhupāda*, and *Festivals* and many articles for *Back to Godhead*, the magazine of the Hare Krishna movement. He is working on several other writing projects.

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Glossary (*Śabda-kośaḥ*)

English	Devanāgarī	Definition
<i>ac</i>	अच्	vowel (Pāṇini); synonym for <i>svara</i>
<i>adhikaraṇa</i>	अधिकरण	location, in the sense of the locative case
<i>aghoṣa</i>	अघोष	light consonant
<i>aikārānta</i>	ऐकारान्त	‘ai’ vowel ending
<i>akārānta</i>	अकारान्त	‘a’ vowel ending
<i>ākārānta</i>	आकारान्त	‘ā’ vowel ending
<i>akṣara</i>	अक्षर	indestructible and indivisible sound
<i>alpa-prāṇa</i>	अल्पप्राण	non-aspirated sound, when the air flow is restricted
<i>ananunāsika</i>	अननुनासिक	twenty-five consonants that are not nasal
<i>antaḥsparsa</i>	अन्तःस्पर्श	literally “in between touch”; synonym of <i>antaḥstha</i>
<i>antaḥstha</i>	अन्तःस्थ	literally “in between position”; semi-vowel consonant
<i>anudātta</i>	अनुदात्त	unraised vowel pitch accent (Vedic Sanskrit)
<i>anunāsika</i>	अनुनासिक	five nasal consonants
<i>anuṣṭup</i>	अनुष्टुप्	the most common verse meter (also called <i>śloka</i>) with eight syllables per <i>pada</i>
<i>anusvāra</i>	अनुस्वार	nasal humming sound
<i>apabhraṃśa</i>	अपभ्रंश	deviation in language
<i>ardhasvara</i>	अर्धस्वर	literally “half vowel”; synonym of <i>antaḥstho</i>
<i>Aṣṭādhyāyī</i>	अष्टाध्यायि	Pāṇini’s Sanskrit grammar book
<i>ātmā</i>	आत्मा	the self, who initiates speech
<i>aukārānta</i>	औकारान्त	‘au’ vowel ending
<i>auṣmāna</i>	औष्मान	heat-generating sound
<i>bala</i>	बल	the force or energy used to vocalize a sound
<i>bhāṣā</i>	भाषा	literally means “language”; Pāṇini uses this word to refer to the Sanskrit language
<i>buddhi</i>	बुद्धि	intelligence that inspires speech
<i>ca-varga</i>	चवर्ग	the palatal group of five <i>sparsa</i> consonants
<i>candrabindu</i>	चन्द्रबिन्दु	a mark indicating a nasalized vowel
<i>chandas</i>	छन्दस्	an appendix of the <i>Vedas</i> dealing with verse meters; also, a specific verse meter
<i>daṇḍa</i>	दण्ड	punctuation mark; a single <i>daṇḍa</i> signals the end of a sentence or half-verse, and a double <i>daṇḍa</i> signals the end of a paragraph or verse
<i>dantya</i>	दन्त्य	the dental position of the tongue, when it presses flatly against the back of the upper teeth
<i>daśāvātāra</i>	दशावतार	the first ten vowels, or <i>svaras</i>

Devalipi	देवलिपि	a synonym for Devanāgarī
Devanāgarī	देवनागरी	the script for writing Sanskrit; the language of the gods
dirgha	दीर्घ	long vowel
ekārānta	एकारान्त	'e' vowel ending
ekaśruti	एकश्रुति	monotone, between <i>anudātta</i> and <i>udātta</i> (Vedic Sanskrit)
gāyatrī	गायत्री	a verse meter with six syllables per <i>pada</i> ; or a meter with three <i>padas</i> , each eight syllables long
ghoṣa	घोष	heavy consonant
guru	गुरु	"heavy" (refers to a syllable)
hal	हल्	synonym of <i>vyañjana</i> (consonant)
halanta	हलन्त	mark signifying the absence of the final 'a' ending or a sound following a word's last consonant
Harināmāmṛta- vyākaraṇa	हरिनामामृतव्याकरण	Jīva Gosvāmī's Sanskrit grammar textbook, which teaches Sanskrit with Kṛṣṇa's names
hrasva	ह्रस्व	short vowel
ikārānta	इकारान्त	'i' vowel ending
ikārānta	ईकारान्त	'ī' vowel ending
īṣat-sparśa	ईषत्स्पर्श	consonant requiring slight contact of the tongue with a point of articulation in the mouth
īṣat-spr̥ṣṭa	ईषत्स्पृष्ट	synonym of <i>īṣat-sparśa</i>
jihvāmūliya	जिह्वामूलीय	a sibilant-substitute for the <i>ka-varga</i>
jyotiṣa	ज्योतिष	an appendix of the <i>Vedas</i> dealing with astrology
kāla	काल	the time duration of a vocal sound
kalpa	कल्प	an appendix of the <i>Vedas</i> dealing with rituals
kaṇṭhya	कण्ठ्य	guttural position of the tongue, when it touches the back of the mouth at the top of the throat
kaṛaṇa	करण	reflection, deflection, amplification, attenuation, or echo of a sound
kaṭhora	कठोर	a hard or voiced sound, involving vibration of the vocal cords
ka-varga	कवर्ग	the guttural group of five <i>sparśa</i> consonants
kāyāgni	कायाग्नि	somatic blaze or bodily fire, which facilitates air movement
laghu	लघु	light (refers to a syllable)
laukika	लौकिक	of the world or worldly; colloquial; classical
liṅga	लिङ्ग	gender
lipi	लिपि	the script for writing a certain language
mahā-prāṇa	महाप्राण	aspirated sound, when the air is emitted from the mouth during articulation of a consonant
manaḥ	मनः	the mind, which deliberates what to speak
mandra	मन्द्र	oscillation of air in the vocal cords
māruta	मारुत	air movement required for speech

mātrā	मात्रा	measure (of time); count; duration; the Devanāgarī mark on or next to a consonant indicating the vowel following that consonant
mṛdu	मृदु	soft or unvoiced sound, which does not require the vocal cords to vibrate, as opposed to <i>kaṭhōra</i>
mūrdhanya	मूर्धन्य	cerebral position of the tongue, when it is arched back to contact the roof of the mouth
murdhni	मुर्ध्नि	roof of the mouth
mūrdhnya	मूर्ध्न्य	literally means “of the cerebrum”
nāḍī	नाडी	pathways of <i>prāṇa</i> , or life air
napuṃsaka-liṅga	नपुंसकलिङ्ग	neutral gender
nāsikya	नासिक्य	synonym for <i>anunāsika</i>
nirukta	निरुक्त	an appendix of the <i>Vedas</i> dealing with the etymology of Sanskrit words
okārānta	ओकारान्त	‘o’ vowel ending
oṣṭhya	ओष्ठ	labial position of the mouth, when the lips are closed and opened to force air between them
pada	पद	quarter verse
pāda	पाद	synonym for <i>pada</i>
pañkti	पङ्क्ति	a verse meter with ten syllables per <i>pada</i>
parāśrita	पराश्रित	a sound that is dependent upon a <i>svara</i>
pa-varga	पवर्ग	the labial group of five <i>sparsa</i> consonants
pluta	प्लुत	protracted vowel
pracaya	प्रचय	in <i>saṃhitā</i> , all <i>anudatta</i> syllables following a <i>svarita</i> are called <i>pracaya</i> and are pronounced <i>ekāśruti</i> (Vedic Sanskrit)
prākṛta	प्राकृत	colloquial vernacular, as opposed to <i>saṃskṛta</i>
pratiṣṭhā	प्रतिष्ठा	a verse meter with four syllables per <i>pada</i>
prayatna	प्रयत्न	the effort in generating a sound or phoneme
puruṣa-liṅga	पुरुषलिङ्ग	masculine gender
ṣaḍ-vedāṅga	षट्वेदाङ्ग	the six appendices of the <i>Vedas</i> : <i>śikṣā</i> , <i>kalpa</i> , <i>vyākaraṇa</i> , <i>nirukta</i> , <i>chandas</i> , and <i>jyotiṣa</i>
samāsa	समास	compound word
sambodhana	सम्बोधन	vocative case
saṃhitā	संहिता	continuous speech
saṃskṛta	संस्कृत	the diacritical spelling of Sanskrit; refined, perfect
saṃyuktākṣara	संयुक्ताक्षर	combined or conjunct consonant
saṃyukta-svara	संयुक्तस्वर	combined vowel
sandhi	सन्धि	grammatical rule of merging words and changing word endings
sannatara	सन्नतर	the <i>anudatta</i> immediately preceding a <i>svarita</i> or <i>udatta</i> is pronounced <i>sannatara</i> , lower than <i>anudatta</i>

<i>saptamī</i>	सप्तमी	locative case; <i>tat-puruṣa-samāsa</i> of which the first member is locative
<i>ṣaṣṭhī</i>	षष्ठी	possessive case
<i>śikṣā</i>	शिक्षा	an appendix of the <i>Vedas</i> dealing with phonetics
<i>śloka</i>	श्लोक	verse; <i>anuṣṭup chandas</i>
<i>sparsa</i>	स्पर्श	consonant requiring complete contact of the tongue with a point of articulation in the mouth
<i>sphoṭa</i>	स्फोट	meaningful sound
<i>sprṣṭa</i>	स्पर्ष्ट	synonym of <i>sparsa</i>
<i>śrauta</i>	श्रौत	relating to <i>śruti</i> , or the four <i>Vedas</i>
<i>sthāna</i>	स्थान	point of articulation or place of origin for a vocal sound
<i>strī-linga</i>	स्त्रीलिङ्ग	feminine gender
<i>supraṭiṣṭhā</i>	सुप्रतिष्ठा	a verse meter with five syllables per <i>pada</i>
<i>sūtra</i>	सूत्र	aphorism
<i>svara</i>	स्वर	vowel, an independent sound
<i>svarāntara</i>	स्वरान्तर	amid vowels or syllables
<i>svarita</i>	स्वरित	a blend of <i>udātta</i> and <i>anudātta</i> (Vedic Sanskrit)
<i>tālavya</i>	तालव्य	palatal position of the tongue, when it is in contact with the palate (top of the mouth behind the gums)
<i>ṭa-varga</i>	टवर्ग	the cerebral group of five <i>sparsa</i> consonants
<i>ta-varga</i>	तवर्ग	the dental group of five <i>sparsa</i> consonants
<i>Sāhitya-darpaṇa</i>	त्रयितदर्पण	a Sanskrit grammar text
<i>triṣṭup</i>	त्रिष्टुप्	a verse meter with eleven syllables per <i>pada</i>
<i>udātta</i>	उदात्त	raised vowel pitch accent (Vedic Sanskrit)
<i>ukārānta</i>	उकारान्त	'u' vowel ending
<i>ūkārānta</i>	ऊकारान्त	'ū' vowel ending
<i>upadhmānīya</i>	उपध्मानीय	a sibilant-substitute for the <i>pa-varga</i>
<i>uṣman</i>	उष्मन्	heat-producing consonants
<i>uṣṇik</i>	उष्णिक्	a verse meter with seven syllables per <i>pada</i>
<i>vaidika</i>	वैदिक	of the original four <i>Vedas</i> ; Vedic
<i>vākya</i>	वाक्य	statement
<i>varga</i>	वर्ग	class, type, or group of consonants
<i>varṇa</i>	वर्ण	indivisible letters
<i>virāma</i>	विराम	rest or break, which is marked in script by a <i>daṇḍa</i>
<i>visarga</i>	विसर्ग	short echo of the previous sound; air releasing sound
<i>vṛhatī</i>	वृहती	a verse meter with nine syllables per <i>pada</i>
<i>vyākaraṇa</i>	व्याकरण	an appendix of the <i>Vedas</i> dealing with Sanskrit grammar
<i>vyañjana</i>	व्यञ्जन	consonant, a sound dependent on <i>svara</i>

Phonetic Glossary

Adapted from: Languagegeek.com

PHONETIC TERMS

This terminology is the standard linguistic means to describe sound.

Affricate

A composite speech sound consisting of a stop and a fricative articulated at the same point (as 'ch' in 'chair' and 'j' in 'joy').

Alveolar

The tongue-tip is touching the ridge behind the top-front teeth, the usual place of articulation for English /t/, /d/, /n/. Also known as dental.

Bilabial

The sound is made by pressing both lips together, as in English /p/, /b/, and /m/.

Cerebral

Pronounced with the tip of the tongue turned back toward the hard palate (the same as retroflex), as in the Sanskrit *r*, *ṇ*, *t*, *ḍ*.

Dental

The tongue-tip is touching the back of the top-front teeth, like the Sanskrit *da*. Also known as alveolar.

Glottal

The glottis is the vocal cords/folds. English /h/ is glottal, as well as the break between the vowels in "uh-oh".

Guttural

A consonant articulated in the back of the mouth or throat, as in English /k/ or /g/. Also known as velar.

Interdental

The tongue is sticking out between the front teeth, like English <th>.

Labio-dental

The top teeth meet the bottom lip, making sounds like English /f/ and /v/.

Lateral

An "l" like sound – air is blowing around the edges of the tongue, while the middle of the tongue is blocking the flow, as in English /l/.

Palatal

The flat part of the tongue is against the hard palate, creating a sort of "y" like flavor to the sound, as in English /y/ or Spanish /ʃ/.

Palato-dental

The flat part of the tongue is touching behind the alveolar ridge, like English <sh>, <ch>, <j>.

Retroflex

Pronounced with the tip of the tongue turned back toward the hard palate (the same as cerebral), as in the Sanskrit ṛ or ṣ.

Uvular

The uvula is the hanging-bit at the back of the throat. Push the back of the tongue further than for /k/.

Velar

The back of the tongue is pushing up against the soft palate, like English /k/, /g/. Also known as guttural.

MANNER OF ARTICULATION

Approximant

Intermediate between a vowel and consonant. The air is even less restricted than a fricative, meaning the tongue is only shaping the mouth cavity to produce a sound. English /l/, /r/, /w/, and /y/ are approximants. Notice that there is a fine line between approximants and vowels, compare /y/ with /i/, as in "year." Corresponds to Sanskrit semi-vowels /y/, /r/, /l/, and /v/.

Aspirated

A voiceless sound with a strong puff of air (or /h/ sound) afterwards. As in English /p/, /k/, /t/ when these sounds occur at the beginning of a word, like pin, kin, and tin.

Fricative

The air is only partially blocked off, so that friction occurs, like English /f/, /s/, /h/.

Nasal

c.f. Stop; a consonant produced through the nose, like English /n/.

Plosive

A consonant produced by stopping the flow of air at some point and suddenly releasing it. Another name for this term is "stop." The first twenty five Sanskrit letters are stops.

Stop

A sound which completely blocks of air through the mouth, such as English /p/, /t/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/. The first three are oral stops, the latter three are nasal stops.

Unaspirated

A consonant that requires less aspiration, i.e., less exhalation of air, like the English /p/ in lip.

Voiced

The vocal cords/folds are vibrating, causing the individual sound of one's voice. Compare English /b/, /v/, /d/, /z/ with their voiceless counterparts.

Voiceless / unvoiced

No vocal cord/fold vibration occurs during the sound, like a softer version of English /p/, /k/, /t/. Also like English /f/, /s/.

VOWELS

Back

The back of the tongue is shaping the vowel as either high or low: English /o/

Front

The front of the tongue is shaping the vowel as either high or low: English /i/, /e/

High

The tongue is close to the top of the mouth: English /i/ /u/.

Long and Short

Long means that the sound's duration is stretched out for twice as long as usual.

Low

The tongue is close to the bottom of the mouth: English /a/.

Mid

The tongue is halfway from the top to the bottom: English /e/, /o/. Variations of mid occur, i.e., high-mid and low-mid, when necessary.

Nasal

For vowels, nasal means that the air is passing through the nose, not the mouth. French has nasal vowels in words like: <bon>, <chanson>, and <France>.

SUPERFRAGMENTALS

Stress or Emphasis

The syllable is pronounced louder, longer, more strongly than usual. English has two or three degrees of stress – primary, secondary, and tertiary (in some dialects). The word “practicality” has secondary stress on the “a” and primary stress on the “á”.

Tone

Tone can be high, low, middle, raising, falling, etc. Tone is purely pitch related, and is not necessarily related with stress – although it often is. East Asian languages (Vietnamese, Cantonese, Thai) are famous for their tone diversity. Vedic Sanskrit also uses vowel pitch accents.

MISCELLANEOUS TERMS

Diacritics

Marks added to a letter to indicate special pronunciation, as the dot below ष.

Macron

A short, straight mark over a vowel to indicate that it is long or pronounced in a certain way (e.g., ā).

Phoneme

One of a small set of speech sounds that are distinguished by the speakers of a particular language (*varṇas* or *aṣaras* in Sanskrit).

Phonetics

The science of vocal sounds that deals with their production and representation.

Syllable

A unit of spoken language composed of phonemes. In Sanskrit, they are called *aṣaras*, which means that the root sounds have permanent individual meanings. : a word or part of a word pronounced with a single, uninterrupted sounding of the voice; unit of pronunciation, consisting of a single sound.

Transliteration

Letter-to-letter transcription, e.g., from Sanskrit to English using roman type with diacritics.

I have carefully studied Lokanatha Maharaja's book on Sanskrit pronunciation, and I have found it to be most wonderful. Anyone wanting to go a little deeper into the language and familiarize themselves with how it should be properly used will find this book an indispensable aid.

For many years I have taken an interest in the subject, but have always struggled with the proper pronunciations. However, now that I've been through Maharaja's book it is like someone turned on a light and everything has become very clear and simple.

Please take advantage of the wonderful opportunity this book offers to enter more deeply into our Vaisnava culture.

Bhakti Caitanya Swami (GBC),
Chairman-Board of Examiners,
Bhaktivedanta College of
Culture & Education
South Africa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda Saṁskṛta Upadeśa:

"The League of Devotees, therefore, will maintain a Sanskrit academy and a degree college especially for the purpose of disseminating the benefit of this great language to all."

(On the mission of the League of Devotees, 1953)

"I am happy to learn that you have begun to teach our students Sanskrit pronunciation. Please see that they can pronounce very nicely the Sanskrit verses."

(Letter, April 17, 1970)

"Sanskrit should be compulsory for all our children."

(Letter, February 28, 1972)

"Pronounce these verses very nicely . . . "

(Lecture, April 14, 1973)

"It was my intention in presenting the books that anyone who would read would learn Sanskrit."

(Letter, September 26, 1975)

His Holiness Lokanatha Maharaja has researched the original, scientific, and authentic method of learning and teaching the Sanskrit language. He has designed this book as a complete guide to Sanskrit pronunciation for any serious student, no matter which lineages and backgrounds they come from, or which accents and types of mouth and lip movements they may be accustomed to in their native tongues. The pain felt by Maharaja when he hears Sanskrit words mispronounced is analogous to the pain felt by the Supreme Lord when He sees religious principles decline. Just as the Lord reestablishes religion, Maharaja wishes to reestablish the exact articulations, accents, and mouth and tongue movements with which every word, letter, and syllable of Sanskrit is pronounced. Although such a great devotee as Maharaja is engaged in worldwide missionary efforts, he has still devoted time to pursue this arduous task. I pray to the Lord to bless him with success. I recommend that all the devotees in ISKCON contribute to and take advantage of this project by reforming their own and others' Sanskrit pronunciation.